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LA STREGA

And Other Stories

True Tales of Lowly Lives

LA STREGA

And Other Stories

BY
OUIDA

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LA STREGA, the Witch: she had been called so these many years, this old and feeble woman who was gathering simples in a meadow by the side of a stream. She had names, her baptismal name, her family name, and the name of her dead husband; dead so long ago in the days of the Fifty-Eight. But no one ever called her any of these. She was only La Strega. Even her church-name of Pià was never heard. People dreaded her, shunned her, despised her; but they sought her always after dark, when they might not be seen by others. They had faith in her magical and sinister powers. She had charms for disease, for accidents, for warts, for tumours, for snake-bites, for many other things; but what she was most famous for in the neighbourhood were her imprecations and her love-charms.

When she cursed any one under a full moon

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it made the blood of the boldest run cold to hear her, and when she gave a lover a bean, or a berry, which she had charmed, he was sure to find favour in the sight of one who had been adamant to his prayers.

So all the hillside folks believed, and she was horrible to them; but she was honoured by them, as such supernatural powers are always loathed, yet revered, in lonely places where superstition is rooted in the soil like the mandrake.

Within a stone's-throw of her a girl was lying by the edge of the stream, face downwards, among the blue bugle and ragged-robin, an empty water-barrel and a copper scoop beside her.

She was lying face downward, resting on her elbows, her hands twisted in her rich auburn hair. "To get him back! To get him back, I would give my soul to hell!" she muttered, as she twisted like a snake which has been struck a brutal blow across the spine.

She was the laughing-stock of the country-side, a few scattered farms lying hidden among woods on a hillside in the Garfagnana. She was the beauty of the district; she was proud, wilful,

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dominant, amorous, and she had been forsaken for another woman.

Publicly forsaken ! All the world, her little world of half a hundred souls who came together from their scattered homesteads at the small church on holy-days and feast-days, knew it, for every one had known that Avellino Conti was her *damo* in the fullest, sweetest meaning of that word.

She did not see the old woman gathering simples near ; but the old woman saw her, and heard her also. Her despair was so visible, her anguish so absorbed her, that Pià, who never spoke to a human creature by daylight, ventured to draw near.

"What is the matter, my handsome wench ?" she ventured to ask.

The girl looked up, her face convulsed with grief and passion. She recognized the Strega. A shudder of disgust and fear ran through her ; it was as if the Evil One she had invoked had lost not a moment in replying to her. But her desperation was stronger in her than her terror.

"Give him back to me, and take my soul !" she muttered.

She clutched her hair savagely with both

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hands ; she bit furiously at the stems of the grasses with her white, even teeth ; her eyes were dry and blazed with lurid pain. No one was willing to be seen speaking with the evil woman by daylight. Whoever sought her counsels went to her, but after nightfall. But Fedalma was in that delirium of distress and passion which makes the mind it ravages dull and insensible of all except itself. She stared through blinding tears at the Strega.

“Give me back my love, and take my soul !” she repeated.

“Come to my house to-night, and we will see,” said Pià. “Tell no one aught. Bring four white pieces with you. Come an hour after moonrise.”

The girl was the daughter of a charcoal-burner, known in the country as Febo Nero (Black Phœbus) ; she had lived all her life in the chestnut woods, under the great trees, amongst the grass and the ling and the broom, seeing only the sheep and the goats and their keepers who came up to the hills of the Garfagnana in summer. Avellino came with them, a fair, lithe, bold youth, with a garment of goat-skins, and a long wand in his hand, and bare feet, and a

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wallet, and an accordion slung at his back, and a bit of meadow-sweet behind his ear. Their love-tale had been told there, under the big trees in the hot balmy weather, with the bees buzzing in the stillness and the flocks asleep. Neither of them heeded the green, calm, silent nature round them, or the blue sky of day, or the stars throbbing in the dark. All the book of nature, like all other books, was naught to them ; they only read each other's eyes, they only knew the instincts and appetites of their young and ardent lives, and followed them as the flocks followed theirs. But they were happy though unreasoning, and but semi-conscious of happiness, also, as the flocks were. All that summer was so good—ah, heavens ! so good ! She tore up the strong dog's-foot grasses in handfuls as she thought of it.

Then, with All Saints' Day, Avellino, with the sheep and the goats, had gone away from the woods down to the plains, as shepherds always do when the first bite of winter nips the still green leaves. And he had not said to her, "Come with me" ; he had only said, "Fiorianno le rose !" and laughed, meaning that their loves would flower again like the wild roses in the

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thickets. The charcoal-burner said to his girl, "Summer love means no marriage ;" but he did not distress himself. The wench was a strong, fine, helpful girl ; he was better pleased that she should stay in his hut and help carry the logs to the burning. The winter was like the ice-hell of Dante to Fedalma, but she had been sustained by the hope and the promise of spring. "A Pasquà fioriranno le rose," she said to herself, and held her fast-beating, passionate heart in such patience as she could, working hard at the charcoal, because thus she tired herself and got a dull, heavy sleep, in which her throbbing pulses were for a while still.

With Easter the chestnuts and the early roses also did blossom, and the flocks came up the steep, winding paths into the higher woods, and Avellino came with them. But in passing he saw the white-faced girl Mercedes, who sat spinning at the lattice of the old farmhouse by the weir, and had seen how white her throat was where the coral circled it. For this, therefore, Fedalma writhed like a bruised snake where she lay on the earth, and bit the tough stems of the dog-grass.

The old woman said nothing more, but went

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on plucking herbs when she found any which were edible, and the girl shook herself with a dreary yet passionate gesture, and began to fill her water-barrel at the stream under the flags. When it was full she raised it on to her head and strode through the grass with bare, wet feet, heedless of asp or adder.

Once Pià smiled to herself as she bent over the herbs she was uprooting. Those silly wenches, breaking their hearts over mannerless rogues who are not worth the yellow bread they break, and who care more for a penn'orth of drink than for all the girls in creation! She knew that Avellino was a ruddy, well-built, blue-eyed lad, strong as a young steer, and as rough. There was no marriage-ring in his pocket; in his veins there was nothing but riot and licence. What could that young fool hope for? When the sheep have cropped the sweetness off a patch of pasture they move on elsewhere, do they not? It is nature, thought Pià, who had once, long before, dwelt in towns and seen other suns than this which rose so late and set so early beyond these hills. She was content; she had caught a simpleton.

She had no magic except her cunning and

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her superior intelligence, but these sufficed to bring such credulous fools to supply her larder, and of all fools she liked best the amorous ones.

"I might have said five white pieces," she thought regretfully; "the girl would have procured them somehow or other."

Five pieces make a lira.

With moonrise that white night Fedalma kept her tryst. The moon was in its third quarter and rose late, and she left the house stealthily by one of its unglazed windows, for fear her father should awake and ask what she was about, stirring at that hour; and ran with beating heart and nervous terror across the two miles of wild country which separated her hut from that of the witch.

"Here are the white pieces," she said, when the old woman opened to her.

Pià took them with a ravenous movement in her wrinkled, bony hand.

"What shall I do? What shall I do?" asked the girl, with feverish impatience.

They stood face to face on the floor of beaten mud; the elder small and frail and bent, the younger tall and straight and full of colour,

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health, and force ; but the strong was the suppliant and the weak was the disposer of fate.

A tallow wick burned in a little flat tin pan of oil and shed a fitful light on the dark brows, the tempestuous eyes, the parted, panting lips of the girl as she muttered, "What shall I do ? What shall I do ?"

She was ready to do anything, to give herself away to any unnameable horror, as she had given her white pieces into that hungry hand. She was horribly afraid ; a nameless terror clutched at her heart and made it stand still ; she believed that the place she stood in, the air she breathed here, the fingers which clutched her coins, were all bewitched, bedevilled, unspeakable in their powers of evil. But passion was stronger in her than fear.

"Tut, tut, young one ; not so fast !" said Pià, with the ghost of a smile on her face. "What you would have me do will take time——"

"Time !"

Time ! She had thought that some familiar, some imp, or some angel, would dart down that moonbeam which fell across the floor, and take his orders and herself straightway to where the

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faithless lover slept on his bed of leaves amidst his flock. Time! Was not love a lightning, like that white fire in storm which came none knew whence, and lit up all the woods, and blinded some, and perhaps slew some, and left others alone—none knew why, except that it was the wish and the whim of that messenger of heaven?

“Time? Why time?” she repeated. “He only lived by my breath such a little while ago!”

“You young fool!” thought wise Pià; but, aloud, she said, in a whisper, “Child, he has been bewitched. That is easy to see. You are fine and fair as a peach-bough in blossom, but to him now you seem as a mere rank thistle-head, for the lad is bewitched.”

“By Mercede?”

“By no other.”

“If I killed her?”

“That would be of no use. The spell would remain. These ills lie deeper than young things like you can dream. Tell me all—of you, of him, of her. Nay, have no fear. What is unseen about us shall not hurt you. They are under my yoke.”

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Fedalma shuddered ; her eyes glanced, like a nervous, hunted animal's, here and there around her, from the cobweb-hung walls to the smoke-begrimed roof of the hut, from the barred wooden door to the hole in the roof through which the moonlight shone down and glistened on the white hair of the Strega as it strayed from under her coif. What demons might not be listening? What surety had she that the old one could keep them harmless and invisible? There was a faggot of knotted and crooked sticks in one corner ; to her excited fancy they were imps who grinned at her and waited——

“Speak, or get you gone,” said Pià, with authority ; for she knew nothing, not even the name of the faithless lover, and she needed to know to act with any skill.

“This, then—oh, this!” said Fedalma in desperation. “Listen! My heart is within me as a charred coal, though my breast is all flame and a thousand snakes tear at my flesh. He lived but through me. We were as two cherries on one stalk. Brook-water was as wine when we drank it from each other's lips. The sheep alone knew. They were kind. Not one of them bleated when we met in their fold in the dark,

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soft nights. A few months ago it was still the same with us. Oh, the blessed hours, the hot smell of the flock, the scent of the mint and the thyme—I shall have them in my nostrils for ever, when I am wretched and old like you! And now, and now it is no more—it is like the cut grass; all is over; he has no eyes but for her; it is for her that the door of the fold opens.”

She screamed aloud, again and again, with her torture, as though she were a lamb of the fold brought to slaughter. Then she broke down into a tempest of sobs.

“Be quiet, and tell me more,” said the Strega.

It was many moments before Fedalma even heard her; many more before she was calm enough to answer. When she could be brought to speak with any degree of composure, the old woman extracted from her all her brief history, with the skill of a superior intelligence turning a poorer one inside-out for its pleasure. She learned, too, which was what most mattered to her, that the girl was very poor, and could not anyhow be made to yield much profit. Still, one never knows; love-sick mortals are like those cripples who will rob, or steal, or do anything under the sun to get money enough to

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hang up a garland or place a candle before their patron saint, who can make, if he will, the lame walk and the blind see. Passion? What was it but the most violent of all fevers? Pià had not forgotten. She, too, long, long before, had known what it was to have the heart turn to a cold cinder in a breast still full of flame. She heard in silence, her small, keen eyes under their wrinkled lids gleaming shrewdly in the fitful light from the saucer of oil.

"You have it badly, the eternal evil," she muttered, with a touch of pity. "Well, well; what I can do I will."

"What can you do?"

"'Tis not for the like of you to know. Those who serve me treat ill the rash and the curious, as serves such irreverent fools aright. Wear this between your breasts. Turn it every night once, twice, thrice, and say, 'Powers, help me! Powers, help me! Powers, help me!' as you turn it. Come again in a week and bring four pieces, some onions, and a pullet whose neck has been wrung, not cut."

She took out of a packet worn under her skirt a black bean, and muttered over it, and spat on it, and gave it to Fedalma, whose young,

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strong hand shook like a leaf in a wind as she took it.

"I have no money," she said woefully. "The onions I can get, and the pullet I will try and get ; but the money——"

"Without the money do not come back," said the elder woman, sharply. "If you come back without it, there is one who will leave the mark of his talons upon you ; ay, and upon your face, too—your handsome face that is like a Pentecost rose."

The girl shuddered, and cowered like a beaten animal.

"I will do what I can, mother," she said humbly. "Is there hope? Will there be hope?"

"Ay, like enough, if you don't anger the ones unseen. Get you gone. Your father may miss you, and will be down in another hour."

Fedalma undid the barred door, trembling, and, once beyond its threshold, fled like a hunted hare over the turf, bearing in her breast, between her skin and her stays, the magical black bean, which seemed to her to lacerate her flesh with a thousand thorns. A thing of sorcery, a gift of the Strega—a devil, for aught

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she knew, shut up in that shape! What would her poor dead mother have said, who had been such a pious soul? What would the Madonna do to her for taking part with the wicked thus?

But she kept the bean in her bosom nevertheless, and went on through the woods as fast as the darkness and roughness of their paths permitted to her. She had committed more than a sin; but she was ready to do worse still, only to get him back, the thankless, worthless, fickle, cruel knave!

The old woman Pià, left alone in her hut, barred her door again, put the white pieces in a bag which she kept under a stone on the hearth, ate a sorry meal of endive and hard crusts which bruised and pricked her toothless gums, blew out the little light, and stretched herself on her bed of dried leaves and heather.

"Poor wench!" she thought; "she has a look of my Isola."

It was many years since her daughter Isola had been upon the earth, many, many years, but she lived in memory to Pià; in that shrivelled, hard old heart, closed to all except the love of gain and the cunning of her trade,

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there was one small place still open to a tenderer thought. For sake of the girl's likeness to the long-buried Isola, she said to herself that she would try and help this poor forsaken fool. She would rob her, because that was habit and wisdom, but she would help her if possible—not with her black arts, of which the Strega knew better than any one else the worthlessness, but with such skill as age and experience can give.

“But save me, saints in glory!” she thought, when she lay on the heather and stared up at the stars throbbing beyond the square hole in the roof. “’Twere easier to pull down those twinklers from the sky than to turn back a man's fancy when it has had its course and fled away. A passion spent is dead as a rotting rat.”

There are many things you can mould in this world, but not a man's amorous fancy. She knew Avellino by look and repute: a fine fellow to the sight, but nothing more; ruddy, and with bold, bright, insolent eyes, which challenged women to resist him if they dare: a youth who spoiled a girl's life as indifferently as he wrung a bird's neck or threw down on the wayside a

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lamb too young to walk, too puny to be worth the trouble of carrying.

One day in the same week the flock of Avellino was resting at noon, when the Strega came near, timidly, lamely, with an old hoe in her hand and an old creel on her back.

"May I pick up a little dung?" she said humbly.

Avellino was ill-pleased, but he was afraid to refuse her—she was the Strega. She began to rake up the damp, black droppings of the sheep. He did not prevent her. She could call down blindness on him or murrain on the sheep, he thought. It was never well to cross such people. She raked up a few of the black balls, then stopped to breathe.

"'Tis ill to be old, young man," she said. "You'll know that one day, if you live, comely and strong as you be now."

Avellino laughed.

"'Tis far off me," he said carelessly; then wondered in affright, could she, maybe, smite him into old age with a curse? "Take a snack of cheese, mother," he said, with a tremor in his voice, as he cut off a slice of the ricotto, made from the curds of the milk of his ewes. She

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took it with humble thanks, and sat down on the roots of a tree and pulled a crust from her pocket.

"'Tis a heart as good as your handsome face that you have, my lad," she said, with fervent blessings.

Avellino watched her with apprehension. She looked very old and poor and feeble; but people said she had such strength for evil that, the paler and frailer and more crooked she grew, the stronger and the wickeder grew her powers for mischief. He was horribly frightened, and the colour left his cheeks; but he was fascinated; if he pleased her, propitiated her, might she not have good in her gifts as well, or, at least, only evil for others? Her renown was great on this hillside, though the hatred and terror of her were still greater. He gazed at her agape. Such a little, thin, pale, withered creature—was it possible that she had troops of devils and imps under her orders? He would have driven his flocks away, but he had three ewes in labour and no one with him.

"You make many a young heart ache for you, you rogue," said Pià, munching the edge of the cheese.

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Avellino smiled: the smile of the conquering booby, his vanity, for a moment, being superior to his fear.

"They're mostly fools," he said, with ungallant scorn, as he kicked a wether in the groin.

"That is a hard word, boy."

"'Tis a true word. Say, all fools, and 'twill be truer."

He grinned, pleased with his own wit and his own courage in exchanging speech with the Strega.

"Poor fools, indeed," thought Pià, "to let the fresh dews of their dawn be drunk up by the fierce sun of his coarse wooing!"

But, aloud, she flattered him deftly and turned him inside-out, as was her habit. There was little to find or to note, only a handsome lout's triumphal conceit and unkind contempt for what he had won and done with, and the obstinate bent of a new fancy growing on the ashes of those burned-out and cold. Mercede, she learned, was as yet obdurate, had not yet come to the sheep-fold at nightfall, as that impassioned simpleton, Fedalma, had done to her cost. Mercede was wise, coy, willing and no

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willing, aiming at the nuptial ring and the priestly blessing, things which for the errant shepherd had no savour.

"If I wed her, you know, I shall leave her," he said candidly ; "leave her when the chestnut-leaves fall, as sure as November will come round. There are others down in the vales, on the plains, in the towns."

And he grinned again and bit a spike of grass, proud of his victories as a conquering male pigeon when it struts to and fro with ruff erect and breast swollen with triumph.

"Mercede has brothers," said Pià, significantly. "They'd follow you. Men are beaten or stabbed on the plains as easily as on the hills."

"A fig for their sticks and stilettos!" said Avellino, stoutly. "I'm a match for all three."

"In strength, ay, ay," said Pià. "But no one's a match for a shot fired from behind a tree on a dark night. Mercede is like to cost you dear, my crowing cockerel."

Avellino was ill-pleased; he was used to courtships short and fierce and sweet and soon over; the woman paid for the pleasure of it; that was how things should be, in his opinion.

"You could lay a spell on them, mother?"

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he said, after a time, in a tentative, frightened murmur.

"I can do many things," replied the Strega, darkly.

"You could make their knives bend like steel and their sticks like touchwood," said Avellino, recalling histories he had heard of her incantations. "'Twould be a good deed, for what call have they to come between their sister and me?"

Pià nodded gravely.

"They will come between." After a pause, she added, "They are three to one."

"The foul fiend take them!" said Avellino, and then was aghast at what he had said, for might she not resent and revenge the mention of her master?

"He will take you, more like," said Pià, with sombre emphasis.

Avellino felt his veins grow as cold as though he were swimming in a winter flood to save his drowning flock.

"Speak him fair for me, speak him fair, mother," he said, with terror; "you see him every sixth night, they say." His teeth chattered as he spoke; he put his hand in the pocket of

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his goat-skin breeches ; he had a few coppers there only ; he held them out shyly.

Pià clutched them ; habit was strong in her, and her ways could not change.

" 'Tis nothing," she said, as she counted them. " Get a crown."

" A crown !" he repeated, with a gasp.

" Ay, a crown."

" I will make you pay through your nose, you cur !" she thought. " And I will drive you to the church-altar, but not with Mercede."

Avellino was dumb with conflicting emotions, his dread of the devil and his sense of his own impotency struggling with his poverty. He was very poor ; he had scarcely anything he could call his own except an old lute and his pipe. The flock was not his, and the wage he had as shepherd was very small.

" A crown ! a crown !" he muttered—the broad silver pieces of an earlier and more solid time still circulate in remote places.

" No less. Do as you like, my pretty lad," said Pià, " and the Powers of Darkness will strengthen the hands of Mercede's brothers."

" I will try, mother ; I will try," muttered Avellino. The brothers of Mercede were a very

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real and fleshly peril, but the ghostly terrors of the Unseen were more horrible to him, for of what use against the latter would be his stout sinews and his slim knife?

Pià took up her creel with the sheep's droppings.

"When shall I see you again, mother?" he said timidly. "If you would like another little snack of cheese——"

"I will be at the ford where you water your sheep the day after to-morrow, at sunset," said Pià ; and the cheese went into her pocket with the bronze pieces. He would bring the silver crown, she was sure of that. Pià was pleased with her machinations as she went home over the heather-clad slopes. She thought she held her fish at the end of her line. She meant to play on his fears and his foibles until she should detach him from his new passion and drag him back to his earlier fealty. She meant to make him atone to Fedalma, whom she had not named because she took more devious and secretive paths to reach her goal, and did not show what was in her brain, lying close-hid there like a hare in the heather. Meantime there was no reason why she should not wring

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what she could out of this heartless handsome lad.

The next night Fedalma appeared. She was trembling, and her gown was rent in several places, and her arms were scratched and bruised and bleeding.

"'Twas a thorn brake I fell into," she said hurriedly. But that was not the truth. She had been to a hen-roost miles off and had stolen a plump pullet from its perch and wrung its neck. But in getting back over the fence she had been attacked by a watch-dog belonging to the place, and had hurt herself on the rough wood of the fence as well. But of this she said nothing, and Pià asked no questions, but took the fowl, with the white pieces and the roots, as the saints in the churches take votive offerings, in silence.

"You have nothing to tell me?" said the girl in breathless anxiety.

"It works, it works," said the Strega vaguely.

"You have seen him?"

"No. Why should I see him, you foolish thing? 'Tis not with mortal ways that the Unseen Powers move and conquer."

Fedalma shuddered.

"The stars are in your favour," continued

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Pià. "I looked in the well at dead of night twenty-four hours ago. Your star shone clear ; his and hers were obscured."

"But were they *together* ?" screamed the girl. In her ignorant, rustic soul something of the imperious passion of Francesca da Rimini stirred. Together even in torture. What joy !

"They were apart," said the old woman.

A wave of ecstasy swept over Fedalma's stormy heart, and her face burned and lightened with rapture. She dropped down on the mud floor of the hut and kissed the Strega's feet, bound in rags and cased in dust.

"What shall I render you?" she cried, with sobs of delight.

Pià was touched, and bade her get up.

"The lad cannot be worth all that," she said, not unkindly. "You are giving a vat of good wine for a pail of muddy water. Think twice. This youth has tired of you. Have pride——"

Fedalma shook her head. Reason said nothing to her. No argument could touch her. She was blind and deaf to everything except her passion.

"I shall be proud when he wears my clematis-flower behind his ear once more !" she

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cried. "I shall be proud when on his lute he sings again to his sheep in my name! I shall be proud when once again he says, 'Dove of my soul, life of my life!' to me—to me, and Mercede sits alone, counting the days that are dead! I shall be proud then—then only. Oh, mother! you are old, so old; but are you so old indeed that you have wholly forgotten your youth?"

"You are mad, poor wench," said Pià; but though her words were harsh, her voice was not so. Ah, yes! The divine delirium! She remembered it. Its fires burned on the horizon of her memory across the black, dim waste of fifty years and more. And this girl was like Isola, Isola who had died from a stab between the shoulder-blades given her by her lover, a soldier from the Basilicata, one feast-day, when he was hot with wine.

"Men are all alike," she muttered. "They are not worth a thought. If only we knew that whilst it was time! Get up, child; get up. I tell you that the stars favour you. He will be yours again, but it will take time. It will take time, and——"

Fedalma did not rise; she crouched upon the floor; her eyes shone and flashed in the

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dark ; the wick in the oil had flickered and gone out slowly.

"You will be true to me, mother?" she muttered. "You will be true, for pity's sake?"

"I will do all I can," said Pià, and she was sincere. "I have others beside you to think of. There is Black Maria, who is afraid of her delivery ; and there is Giano's Leonilda, whose lame child must be charmed straighter ; and there is the sick cow of Annibale to be cured ; but I will do more for you than for any. Does the amulet I gave you turn of itself sometimes?"

"I don't know," answered the girl in a frightened voice. "Yes, I think so. Is that a good sign?"

"Surely. As it turns, so will your lad turn to you in his dreams, and from dreaming to doing 'tis but a step. Go away now, child, and come back in three days. Bring what you can. I will pray the Powers to be content."

"I have nothing. Father has nothing. I had to steal the pullet——"

"Well, well ; bring what you can."

That was as much generosity in the ways of her life as the avarice of her habits could reach. She let the girl go without exacting from her

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any especial fee, the girl who had Isola's eyes and Isola's cheeks like apricots.

She pulled Fedalma up off the floor and shoved her to the door ; she herself was so little and so fleshless and so aged, but she had a strength of steel in her wrists. She had heard a tap at the wooden shutter of the aperture which served as a window. She expected Annibale to come to her about his cow, and she never chose that two of her clients should meet. She had the charm for the cow ready : a little bit of wood with some signs burned on it, with a red-hot skewer, and some powdered mandrake root tied to it, wrapped in a small bag. Annibale was to pay well for this.

" I will make him go to church with her," she thought when she was alone, and the man Annibale had gone away carrying his charm with reverence and fear, and warned to tie it round the cow's neck when the moon first showed herself, and as he did so to say, " Guai, guai, guai, a chi me fa patai ! " a rough rhyme which he went saying to himself, for fear he should forget it, all the four miles over the hills which parted his homestead from the Strega's hut ; it was to be tied on with hemp ; tied on with

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anything else but hemp the spell would be broken.

"I will make him go to church with her," thought Pià again, as she looked at the pullet. It was a fat, fine bird ; its poor head hung down by its broken neck ; it was scarcely cold. She did not dream of eating it ; she had never eaten such a thing in her life. She could get a couple of lire or a lira and a half for it from the wife of a forest-guard who was marrying a daughter that week and would be making feast. Something more perhaps even that woman would give, for she had come to the Strega not long before to get a charm, and was afraid her husband should know it, since he held that all doings with the devil or the devil's agents should take whoever played with such hell-fire straight down into the fire itself. She would make the shepherd lad atone to Fedalma ; the girl was worth a score such as he. Fedalma would be wretched, perhaps ; she would have a hard life and a faithless spouse ; she would bear children unpitied, more untended than the ewes ; she would tramp along the roads autumn and spring, to and fro, from hill to plain and plain to hill, with the flocks ; she would have to pasture them and water them

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and fold them, for Avellino would surely put all his toil on her shoulders. She would be miserable ; but, then, she would have had her own way and wish, and won her own man, and what can a woman hope for more ?

So she was true to her word for Fedalma's sake, and went at sunset two days later to the ford. The ford was where a mountain-stream coming down through the woods became in summer-time, at a level place, quiet enough and shallow enough for sheep to drink there without danger from the impetuosity of the water. In autumn and winter and early spring it was in flood and drowned man or beast at its pleasure ; but now, when midsummer was past, it was shallow, and the flock drank fearlessly.

Pià followed the course of the stream through the myrtles and oleanders which fringed it, and saw the place where, broad and shallow and interspersed with dry patches of sand and stone, the stream was quiet. The flock was there, slaking its thirst, and the shepherd was sitting, swinging his legs, above his sheep on a fallen tree. The light was warm on the water and the hills were deep in colour as the old woman took the crown from Avellino, whose fingers

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released it unwillingly and whose eyes gleamed with suspicion and curiosity and a dim, angry sense that he was being duped. He, like Fedalma, had stolen the offering to the Unseen Powers ; he had stolen it out of his employer's canvas bag, of which he knew the hiding-place ; a fine, broad, sparkling silver scudo, which had been for years secreted with other pieces of the good old Ducal times. And having run the risk and done the sin for her, he had taken one for himself also.

"What will you do for it, mother?" he muttered.

"You want a spell laid on your Mercede's brothers?"

"Ay, any you like that will make them blind or keep them harmless !"

Pià nodded.

"They shall be limp as linen in the water," she said mysteriously. "They shall be sightless as the pups born yesterday, as the worm that tunnels the earth. Never fear, lad ; they shall kiss you on both cheeks if you wish."

"No, no," said the youth, uneasily. "If they let me alone 'twill be enough. Shut their eyes ; that is best."

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He was afraid of those three men.

"Of Mercede you are sure?"

"Whew!" said Avellino, tossing his head back saucily and snapping his fingers in the air.

"What is it you see in her so fine? That wench of Febo's that you've broken the heart of is twice as good to look at as such a little flimsy thing."

Avellino's smile broadened. He had few words at command, but his face was very eloquent. He snapped his fingers in the air again.

"She's the stone of an eaten peach," he said, with much contempt.

"You beast!" thought Pià; and if she had really possessed the powers she assumed, she would have had him flung into the deep pool which the stream made amongst the rocks below—a pool deep as a grave even in summer heats.

"Say, rather, she's the young peach-tree itself. She'd bear fine fruit if the sun reached her."

Avellino scowled and lit his pipe.

"I didn't give you the crown to talk of that fool."

"Take your crown," said Pià, "and deal with

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Mercede's brothers on a dark night, unhelped, as best you may."

She threw the crown down between them. It cut her to the heart to risk its loss ; but she knew the craven temper of the lad—there was not much fear of losing it.

He was instantly alarmed, remembered that she was not the feeble crone she looked, sat sheepish on the tree-stump for a moment, doubting, fearing, hesitating, longing to pick up the silver piece, fearing his foes and the devil. Then he said entreatingly—

"I did but jest. Nay, I know 'tis bad to joke with wise women like you. Take the crown and keep it, good mother. I meant no affront. Take it, take it ; and keep them off me, the men and the devils both."

He picked up the scudo and tendered it to her timidly.

She took it with an air of condescension and reluctance.

"'Tis not me you offend," she said sternly. "'Tis all those around you in the air, who can cleave your tongue in twain, make your eyes balls of blood, palsy your limbs, and cause your teeth to fall out, if they choose."

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His ruddy skin grew white. He believed her. He fancied his sight was failing him ; he felt his teeth with his hand.

“Respect that of which you cannot judge,” said Pià, sternly. “Be humble as you are daft.”

He hung his head, abashed, like a chidden child. This little, grey, shrivelled woman was invested with all the majesty of the unutterable and inconceivable terrors which were associated with her.

What a small thing was a bit of the root of the meadow-coltsfoot, and yet it could kill a sheep in three minutes ; he knew it, for he had seen it do so. This dreadful little old creature was, amongst men and women, what the colts-foot was amongst other grasses. He was helpless before her as the sheep under the poison. If she left him his life and took his good looks, what would life be to him?—he who was as vain of his curly locks and his ruddy cheeks and his lusty limbs as was of hers any village beauty who stuck gold pins in her hair and carnations in her bodice as he passed under her window or by her threshold as he went through hamlet and township in April and November. Often and often when he was watering the flock did

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he lean down and look, like Narcissus, at his own image in the water between the flags. His beauty was the May-fly with which he won his fish.

"Don't disfigure me, don't deform me!" he muttered in terror. "I will get you more of those pieces if you will only make them leave me alone!"

"It is not alone silver pieces that they will have."

"What, then?"

His voice and his face were scared. If she wanted gold, he could not get it. There was no gold in the canvas bag, nor anywhere in the province that he knew. He had heard of gold, but he had never seen it.

"They will have obedience," said Pià.

Obedience!

The priests talked of obedience, but who gave it them? Were the unclean spirits stronger than the saints? Yes, no doubt; the coltsfoot was stronger than the meadow grasses, stronger, a vast deal stronger, than the dews which came down from heaven. Then he remembered horrible stories told, as lads and lasses sat stripping the maize and shelling the walnuts round the

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brazier on farmhouse hearths, of gruesome errands ordered by the evil ones, of midnight rides behind witches, of commands to cut out living hearts from cradled children or tear fangs from venomous wood-snakes. What use was it having stolen the crown if he got no more in return than this, and became the slave of the Strega? He struggled to say this, to free himself, to laugh at the old crone, and tell her to go to her master, the devil; but the words died in his throat, his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth. Fear paralyzed him.

"I can spend no more time with you," said Pià, sternly. "Look to yourself, and don't blame me when you lie gasping in a thicket with the blood gurgling out of you where Mercede's brothers shall have let daylight into your belly."

Then she turned her back on him and went, as it seemed to him, with incredible swiftness through the bushes that grew by the line of the water.

"Stop, mother, stop!" he said with a gasp, squeezing his throat with his hand to push his voice out of it.

But Pià would not stop. She knew how to deal with male creatures.

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Of course, he could have overtaken her with a stride or two ; of course, he could have clutched and killed her, if he had wished, in a moment—that is, he could have done so if she had been an ordinary woman, and if the virus of terror had not been corroding his veins. As it was, he stood motionless, as if rooted to the soil. She knew that he would come and implore her aid that night or the next. She did not even look back, but hurried on, her black shawl over her head, the gnats stinging her naked feet. She was sure that she held the rogue fast. She would drive him through his terrors to marry Fedalma. The broken vase should be mended ; if in the future it would only hold thistle-seeds and thorns, she could not help that. Who breaks pays. It is a fair saying, but seldom a true one. She meant to make it true in this instance.

She took his crown as she took the girl's pullet, but she was loyal in her double-faced, secretive way to them both. When Fedalma came on the next evening to her, she said mysteriously—

“ All goes well. The Unseen favour you.”

The girl quivered with rapture.

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"They will make Mercede unlovely and undesirable in his sight. More I do not know yet," said Pià. "That is much, eh?"

"Ay, indeed!"

Fedalma laughed and sobbed in the hysteria of a passionate hope.

"The bean turned of itself three times last night," she murmured under her breath.

"Surely," said Pià, with the calmness of one to whom such miracles in nature are familiar.

"I am so frightened when it moves," said the girl, still laughing and weeping; "I can hardly hold myself from plucking it off me. I feel such terror of it; it pricks sometimes, and one knows 'tis alive—more than alive."

"Surely," said Pià, nodding her head with significance. "Mind you don't ever anger it. 'Twould burn your reed roof over your head."

Fedalma shuddered. It requires some courage to keep what you firmly believe to be the devil between your skin and your shift.

"But they do meet still?" she said, with jealousy and misgiving. "I am sure 'twas they I saw down by the cane-brake by Silvio's mill. I was far off, but I am sure."

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"You mistake," said Pià. "The spirits who are against you make you see those false visions. Believe naught that you see or hear; only believe what I tell you."

Fedalma was only too willing to doubt the evidence of her own senses in such a matter. She went humbly and happily away, borne up by the wings of faith and of hope, leaving four more white pieces and some fresh onions with the Strega; how she had got them Pià did not ask.

She was on her bed for the night, for she was tired and footsore from the long walk to the ford, when she heard a scratch at the door.

"Who's there?" she asked.

"Avellino," said the young shepherd's voice.

Pià got up; she never undressed from one year's end to the other. She only undid her black shawl and hung it on a nail for the night. After satisfying herself that it was really Avellino, she let him enter, and eagerly eyed what he had brought. He had brought a lamb. It had died of disease and cost him nothing. He had cut its throat and skinned it.

Pià smelt it and guessed its end.

"'Tis carrion," she said, with a shrewd smile.

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"Thank you for naught. I have a mind to send your flock the foot-rot."

"She is a witch indeed!" thought her visitor. Who else could have known the creature's end when he had cut its throat and skinned it?

He swore that it had been sucking its dam when he had killed it.

"You are a fool to lie to me," said Pià. Nevertheless she took the poor little carcase and hung it up beside her black shawl.

"What do you come here for?" she said sternly. "I have done with you. You were down by Silvio's mill last eve with your new wench. Do you think nobody has eyes?"

"We were in the canes where they're so thick and tall," stammered the youth, sorely disquieted.

"They may be thick and tall. They are not so thick and not so tall that steel and shot would not pierce them."

Avellino trembled like a leaf.

"How d' you know, mother?"

"There is naught I do not know," said Pià, darkly. "What is proof against shot and steel cannot hold against me—or against those I

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serve," she added in a tone which chilled his blood to ice.

He left her presence more certain than ever that she could dispose of him here and hereafter as she chose. He had been for an instant sorely moved to strangle her and put her body under her own hearthstone, but he had not courage. That small wizen face of hers, looking smaller than ever and more than ever wizen with the wisps of her white hair uncovered, was so plainly the face of one not human and not mortal. She had told him he must obey or perish of murrain with his whole flock. And obey in what? In nothing less than in marriage with the girl he had forsaken. All the good cheese, and the silver crown, and the dead lamb, thrown away only to hear such an order from the foul fiends as this! He groaned aloud as he went through the heather. He knew that sooner or later he would have to do what the Powers of Evil told him.

The magic which Pià did exercise was the potency of suggestion; she knew nothing of the meaning of her gift, but she had an almost illimitable power over these uninstructed minds, so dim, so timorous, so credulous. She steered

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them as the fisherman of the lagoon steers his rowing-boat, netting what he will. Her life had been for more years than she could count lonely and miserable ; but two things in it were dear to her : the pot full of bronze and white money, of which nobody divined the existence, and her arbitrary exercise of her power over others. He was a fool ; and Pià, who was a clever if unlettered woman, had no pity for fools. He was a selfish brute, too ; and she had suffered from just such a fair-faced rascal in her own early years—years which across the gulf of half a century could still stretch out their sting and touch her with sharp pains.

Three weeks passed, and turn by turn she saw her young people, and terrified the one and consoled the other, and moulded and shaped their thoughts to her liking, and got, now from the one, now from the other, such offerings as by sacrifice or theft they could bring to her : poor presents, indeed, but to her precious. The girl grew more impatient as she grew more sanguine ; the youth became more docile as he became more cowed.

The fruit was growing ripe for the plucking, she thought ; she must not, she knew, dawdle

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on too long ; their passions were lighted tow ; they must be fanned or put out without wavering, or the flames might run amuck through fresh fields over which she would have no control.

So one night when the girl came to her hut she said to her :

“ Child, you wish for a bed of thorns because you think it a bed of roses. Well, you shall have it and lie on it. Your fellow will marry you. When once he is wed then you will keep him, if you are not a fool ; but I fear you are a fool.”

Fedalma smiled, the defiant, radiant sunrise-smile of assured happiness.

“ Oh, mother ! dear mother ! ” she cried in ecstasy, “ what can I give you for all you give me ? I was a fool ; yes. I was afraid of the bean in my breast.”

For Pià had brought Avellino to this point ; by threats, by coaxings, by insinuation, by the dominant force of superior intelligence, she had kneaded his foolish and fearsome brains until she had made them ductile to take the shape she wished. He had consented to all she suggested ; he went meek, if sullen, on the road

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along which she drove him. He submitted to what she ordered, and the priest was spoken with ; the one who was nearest, who said Mass once a month at a little grey church amongst the pine woods. The religious marriage is still often the only one that peasants in remote places think needful : the law counts for little with them. The matter was kept hushed and quiet. Pià wished it to be so ; she was afraid if the light of day was let in on her work it might be undone ; she worked best in the dark, as the bats do. She wanted no one to know her share in the lovers' reconciliation. Mercede might move ; her brothers might also ; silence and secrecy were safest.

And one night, in her little hut, she brought about their meeting, and pushed the reluctant faithless swain into the arms of the woman who loved him with such unmerited persistence and passion.

"What can I render you, oh, you wondrous one?" cried Fedalma to her, when the young shepherd, sorely discomfited and scarcely concealing his discomfiture, had kissed her and promised the church, and gone out into the night air, which was blowing hot and sullen

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under a sirocco wind. "What shall I render you? How shall I labour for you? Nothing in all my life long that I can do will I refuse."

She meant every word she said ; her cheeks were once more like Pentecost roses, her great eyes shone with rapture and pride ; he was hers once more ; she would get him and keep him from pale Mercede and from every other female thing born of woman ; he was responseless as a cold bar of black iron, it was true, but within her was the flame which would make the iron, however stubborn, grow red-hot and bend.

"He'll ill-treat you," muttered Pià, wishing her work undone.

Fedalma laughed with vain, rapturous incredulity.

"Nay, nay, not he," she said proudly. "My arm is strong and my heart is hot ; I shall hold him so close he shall never see that another woman is living. I may die on the stony road in childbirth, like one of his ewes, and maybe I shall ; but I'll never cease to bless you, mother, for what you've done for me."

"Well, well," said Pià, touched more than she chose to show ; "you're a crazy wench, my poor

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girl, but you've a grateful soul. That's more than be said of most."

The thing was done.

The false wooer was dragged back and tied to his destiny with charmed ropes which he did not dare to break. Fedalma drank the waters of Paradise.

She had nothing of her own with which to show her gratitude. She stole a pair of ducklings at sore risk, and brought them to the Strega, and she walked ten miles to a chapel famous for its miracles, and prayed to the Madonna to pardon her if she had done wrong in stealing the birds, and still more wrong in using black arts.

"Do not be angry with me or with the old one," she said passionately to the Holy Mary in whom she believed. "If the saints would only hear a little quicker we should not turn to the devil."

And then she prayed to have mercy shown to Pià, and prayed that the aged soul might be cleansed and accepted before death; "for if she have helped us with unholy ways, yet she has done a holy thing," she said as she lay prostrate before the shrine, not knowing very clearly what

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she meant, but striving with all the might of her gratitude to have the witch who had aided her assoiled and pardoned ; for happiness did not make her, as it makes many wiser than she, selfish in her joy. The priests would have told her that she committed an inexcusable sin in praying for the soul of a sorceress, for the soul of a daughter and wife of the fiend ; that even to breathe such a name in a consecrated place was heresy, blasphemy, damnation eternal.

But she did pray, though she prayed in trembling ; for had she not still the enchanted bean in her bosom ?

“ She has done so much for me, something I must risk for her,” she thought, as she kissed the waxen foot of the Madonna ; it was the same thought as when she had stolen the ducks. The very ignorant know not what they feel nor why they act ; they are incapable alike of analysis or synthesis ; but sometimes their spontaneous and almost unconscious acts are beautiful.

With her heart beating high in her breast, she went down from the mountain sanctuary to which she had climbed as the day drew near its close. She had to walk ten miles and more back to her father’s cabin in the woods, but the

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descent was easy. The autumnal weather was radiant, and the whole hillside and the woods below were bathed in golden light. She was so happy, so fearless, she could have kissed the bewitched bean in her bosom!

She sang aloud in her gladness of spirit one of the amorous invocations of the province. Her clear loud notes rang through the solitude; a whitethroat in a pine-tree answered her as she passed.

She was so happy! Her idol might be sullen for awhile, resentful, reluctant; but he would be hers. Surely she would know, as she had said to Pià, how to heat and to bend the iron. He had loved her so ardently only a few months before, it would be strange indeed if she could not fan that flame into fury once more.

"He will be mine—mine—mine!" she sang, as if it were the burden of a ballad, as she went, erect and glorious in the pride of her strength and her triumph, over the fallen fir-needles which strewed the path.

When she entered into the lower woods, the woods of chestnut and beech, it was evening; the little brown owls were flying through the trees. Up above, where the sanctuary stood,

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the mountains had still the light of the sun, but here on the lower hills it was already almost dark. In the gloom before her father's hut there was a little group of men. She approached them, unsuspecting, scarcely noting them, full of her own emotions, singing still.

They broke away from each other at sight of her, and stood apart like persons afraid. Her father, Febo Nero, alone ran towards her, gesticulating wildly without a word. Her heart stood still with a prescience of ill.

"What is it?" she asked.

Febo clutched her arm.

"Did you lie when you said you were to wed with your *damo*? Come, say!"

"I am to wed with him," she answered. "Who dares say not?"

Febo broke into a rude, harsh laugh: he was an unkind man.

"You double fool!" he said savagely. "Was it not enough to let him fool you once? He's gone, and Mercede of Cecco too; and the sheep left unguarded and unfed, and his master here crazy with rage. And he's gone to the sea-coast, they say, and he'll sail for Brazil straight away. Mercede took her dower out of the pitcher under

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the walnut-tree ; she knew where 'twas kept, and 'tis gone with her. Ay, you fool—you double and triple fool ! I've a mind to stone you till you're dead, as one stones a toad."

She swept him aside with a gesture superb in its authority, and went to where the employer of Avellino stood, an old, shrewd, weather-beaten man.

"Is it true ?" she said in her throat.

"Ay, for certain 'tis true," he answered ; "and my flock left alone, unwatered, unfed, unwatched—a miracle they're not stolen. Lord, lass, how you look ! You're better without the scoundrel. Let him go to the Americas, and be damned !"

But she did not pause to hear his rough consolation ; she put her head down, as a cow, enraged and bereaved, lowers hers to attack, and tore along the path of the wood in the gloaming, and soon was lost to sight.

The men looked at one another, unkindly diverted, yet vaguely afraid. Febo cursed her with savage heartiness. Swift as the wind, lightning-footed as Nemesis, she rushed through the familiar glades, breaking bracken and bramble in her headlong flight. She never paused, but flew over the rough stones, the long grass, the

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rivulets, the wild sage and thyme, until she reached the place where the Strega dwelt. It was now quite dark.

She flung herself against the door. Its wooden bar was fastened within, but the wood was old and yielded to her violent impetus. She entered. Pià was on her knees beside the cold hearth counting the money which she kept in a hole under the stones. As she rose, startled at the crash of the door forced open, Fedalma threw herself upon her, clutched the old, wrinkled throat, and crushed it between her hands.

"You deceived me, you spawn of hell!" she screamed, as the old woman writhed in her grasp.

In vain did the Strega struggle to get herself free; the fingers of Fedalma were more cruel than a tiger's fangs.

"You deceived me!" she hissed again and again.

"No—no—no!" said the old woman, as, in one supreme effort, she wrenched herself free for a moment from that strangling grasp.

"You deceived me!" cried the girl. Her face was black with passion, her lips were drawn back from her clenched teeth: she was mad with agony and rage. She held the throat of

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the Strega with her left hand alone, and with her right hand plucked from her bosom the black bean.

“Eat your devil and die!” she cried, with a hideous laugh, as she forced the jaws of Pià open, and thrust the bean into her tonsils, down, down, deep down, till it choked the gullet; and, with her left hand, she meanwhile squeezed harder and harder the muscles of the quivering throat.

In another moment the witch could no longer struggle, and in a few seconds more her face grew livid, then purple, then livid again; she ceased to gasp; she ceased to breathe; her feet kicked the air convulsively for an instant; then she was dead.

With all her might Fedalma raised the body high above her head, shook it as though it were an empty sack, and dashed it on the stones. It fell heavily and never moved. She had her vengeance.

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"How it grows!" said the young man, looking with pride and affection up at a tree he had planted. It was a plum-tree, of the kind which gives the golden luscious plums which in England are called *Magnum Bonum*, in France and in Italy, *Reine Claude* and *Claudia*. He had planted it against a south-east wall, and it had thriven well, liking its position and rewarding the care he took of it. He knew little of fruit or plants, but an old gardener had told him what to do with this tree, and it had flourished with him.

He had been twelve years old when he had set it in the earth, and he was now twenty. His daily occupation was to mend the roads of his commune, but he worked in his little bit of garden after sunset, and before the day's duties began.

His name was Paolino Sizzo; he maintained his mother and sister; his father was dead. His

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little grey house, with its red-brown roof, stood amongst the fields and hills of a rural commune called Marignolle, which lies to the right of the Certosa of Val d'Ema. He was spared military service because he was the only son of his mother. The lives of all of them were hard, but they did not think so, for they knew no other. When they had oil enough to eat with their beans and a big round loaf in the cupboard, they were content. The mother spun and made their clothes.

The little daughter Ernesta went to and fro to the village school, and did not do much else than play and laugh, and eat as much bread as she could get ; but she was a merry girl, and made sunshine in the house, and she showed all her pretty teeth, as white as a young dog's, in glee, when there was anything extra to eat on Sundays.

"You spoil the child," grumbled the mother, when Paolino brought a little gift of sweetstuff or fruit for his sister ; but while she said it she was pleased and grateful that her son was so good to his sister instead of spending his spare pence in gambling or on drink.

She herself was a bent, worn woman ; grey-

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haired before her time, for she was not yet forty ; but she went out to work most days ; hard work —washing, cutting corn, turning hay, gathering tomatoes, shelling beans in the hot sun ; and this kind of labour ages soon when it is not sustained by good food.

When they were all out, the door of the little house was locked, and it was left to itself. There was nothing to steal except a few copper vessels. Only when the plums were ripening Paolino said to his mother, " Stay and see that nobody takes them, mother ;" and then the widow would rest, sitting on a wooden bench by the door and spinning, for both he and she knew that, if they were not watched, the nimble hands of Ernesta would play havoc with the fruit ; not speaking of the village children who would pass by, and the big rats who would run down from the roof.

The work of Paolino was one which took him out in all weathers, and his tools were heavy and large ; and the constant rooting up of the roadside grass was a tiresome labour, ever renewing itself, never really done. But he liked his work. He could rest, when the hour of rest came, under the hedges of hazel and dog-rose,

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and he knew everybody who passed by, whether gentle-folks or poor folks, and at the cottages he would have a chat and a draught of watered wine, and at the villa gates he would sometimes get a franc if it were Easter time or Christmas. Of course, he was only an underling at his age, but he hoped to be the head man on those roads in due time, as his father had been. He had no other or higher aim in life. He was quite content.

After all it was a life of some interest to any one like Paolino, who took interest in all that passed around him. His sphere indeed was limited by the mile-stones, and measured not quite three kilometres ; but he knew every living creature, human, equine, feline, or canine, that passed over his roads, and knew all about them.

When he went home to his supper he had all sorts of news ; the marquis had bought a beautiful young horse, bay with black points ; the priest's little dog had been washed and clipped ; the miller had had his pocket picked in the town ; a tramp had been found getting over the gates of one villa, the children at another were ill with fever ; the crockery cart, as it made its rounds, had lost a wheel and several

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bits of earthenware had tumbled into the ditch and been broken ; the knife-grinder had said that there had been a great fire at a factory in the city ; the baker's little donkey had fallen and cut its knees ; the foreign lady who owned the large greyhounds had passed him and spoken kindly to him ; the steward had gone by on his cob and had nodded and called out, "*La Madre? Com' 'l sta?*" And all these pieces of local intelligence interested his mother and Ernesta, as the telegrams in the morning papers interest ourselves. Every day there was, of course, some one or something different to the previous day, if it were only that the vicar had on new buckled shoes, or that the little ducklings of a neighbour were thriving finely, or that the Franciscan friar had a cough.

Whenever she heard that the priest or the miller, or the steward or the friar, had inquired for her, his mother was a proud and happy woman. Paolino did not tell her that they seldom stopped to hear the answer. "Of course," he thought, "it is only just done out of politeness ; they don't really care."

The vicar did care, perhaps ; he who lived on the crest of the hill at the church with the tall

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white tower. He was a good man, fond of long walks, in which he was always followed by his little white fox-dog ; and he knew the mother, Rosina, well, for she was always in her place at mass and vespers, and the only sins she had to confess, after much searching of her heart, were that she had envied her neighbour's good luck with her chickens, or had been gluttonous in eating too much ricotto, a rude sort of imitation of cream cheese made with sour milk, and highly in favour with country people.

This was in the summer ; and in the winter there were the tales to tell of flood in the city, or perhaps even snow ; of how the pedlar had been blown down coming from the hills ; of the water-mill wheels being frozen ; or of how the priest's little dog had grown his thick furry coat again in readiness for the cold.

Paolino himself, having a feeling for these things, noted also when the violets came and the primroses showed first ; when the hawthorn in the hedges blossomed : when the nightingale first sang ; but these matters did not interest his women, and so he very rarely indeed spoke of them. But without saying anything to any one, he noticed the earliest swallow, the passing

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of the sea-birds down the green river water, the flowering of the bryony, the dogrose, and the foxglove in the hedges which fringed his roads ; and he would in all probability have gone on doing this for many years of the twentieth century had not the Municipal Office of Florence come to a new and, for him, disastrous decision. It decided that it had too many rural road-menders in its employment, and decided to dismiss one-fifth of the men in its pay.

It was one day in mid-winter that this resolve of his superiors was made known to Paolino. He had gone into the city, as usual on a Saturday, for his weekly wage, and, when he had received it, was told in the curtest manner possible that his services would be required no longer.

He could not understand. He could not believe. Indeed, he was so stupid and tiresome in his manner, and his incredulity, that the official who made the communication grew impatient, and shouted to him that there were gendarmes both inside and out of the Communal Palace for refractory persons.

"But what have I done ? Tell me where my fault is ?" asked the poor lad, holding his week's wage in his outstretched palm.

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"You have done nothing," said the official, contemptuously. "You have no fault that I know of, but you are struck off the rolls; you are not wanted any longer."

The cruel fact was some minutes before it could insert itself into the boy's brain, in which a thousand hammers seemed beating, and a thousand bells ringing.

"But we shall starve!" he cried, as soon as he did comprehend. "Mother and Nesta have nobody to look to, only me!"

"With that we have nothing to do," said the official, and added, "there is always work to be found by those who are really willing to do it."

"But give me a reason! Give me a reason!" screamed Paolino, his blood getting hot, and sparks dancing before his eyes.

"The reason is clear," said the official, loftily. "The Municipality does not want you. You are dismissed."

Then as Paolino in his youthful ignorance and desperation most unwisely lifted up his voice and poured forth shrill curses on the Syndic and the Council, as a lost dog throws up its head and howls to the empty air, the clerks, whom power made potentates, lost all

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patience with him, summoned the guards, and bade them take the fellow out into the square. He was creating a disturbance. He was led roughly into the courtyard and into the sunshine.

"Go home, you fool," said one of the guards, "and thank your lucky stars you are not locked up. If there's anything against you another time it will go hard with you."

"But they will starve! They will starve!" screamed the boy, getting a crowd around him, who were ready to take sides with him, though they had no idea what his wrongs might be.

"What is the matter?" cried the citizens.

"The matter!" shouted Paolino. "They send me away when I have no fault, and my father on those roads till his death before me, and——"

His words were cut short by the guards lifting him off his feet and pitching him head foremost past an iron door which another guard held open at that moment, as a sinister-looking vehicle lumbered out of the Communal courtyard. The door was banged upon him; he was in a prison van, in company with seven other

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young men who were being moved from the Tribunal to the Murate.

"A lesson does no harm to these youngsters in these revolutionary times," thought the Commissary of Police, to whom he was brought after some hours' detention; he considered the guards had been too zealous, but he did not say so. He merely cautioned the prisoner to be careful to abstain in future from causing any disturbance in the public streets, and then set him free.

Paolino's head was hung down, his face was red and sullen, the tears coursed down his cheeks.

"We shall starve. We shall starve," he repeated. "Why am I sent away? I am not in fault."

"Oh, into that I cannot enter," said the Commissary. "The Municipality paid you weekly?"

"Yes, and father before me."

"Then it is fully within its rights to dismiss you without notice. If you complain you will be more stringently punished."

They pushed him out of the Commissary's presence, hustled and jostled till he was as bewildered as a sheep being driven to the

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shambles. He found himself again in the open air and at liberty to go home.

“Oh, Lord, how shall I tell them?” he said with a groan; and then for the first time he perceived that he had lost the week’s wages. As they had cuffed and banged him about, to get him, despite his struggles, into the van, the flimsy paper money had slipped out of his hand and gone—who knows where?

Paolino dropped on a stone under an old church, hid his face in his hands, and sobbed bitterly. When he had come down into the city it had been ten o’clock; it was now four in the afternoon; he had eaten nothing, but he felt no hunger. He was bruised and aching in many parts of his body from the rough usage he had received.

He got up with pain, and took his way across the town towards his home.

It chanced to be a Corso day in Carnival, and he met the gay holiday-making stream of human beings, and the grand carriage horses with their flowers and streamers to their ears. A bouquet struck him on the cheek as he went.

He bore the pleasure-seeking crowds no ill-will, for he had no ill-will in him, but the

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contrast of their festival and his sorrow hurt him. He walked as quickly as his bruised limbs would take him to get out of the gates and into the green country roads where he was never to work any more.

"I must have done something and they won't tell me what," he thought, racking his brain to think what his offence could possibly have been.

It was quite dark when he reached the little house in the hilly lane where his home was. His mother was standing at the door with a lighted oil wick in an old brass lamp in her hand.

"Oh, the dear Mother of us all be praised!" she cried, in joyous agitation. "Dear lad, I did think as how you had been run over by the carnival folks, or something worse. Where have you been all the livelong day?"

Paolino did not answer her, but walked slowly past her into the cottage and threw himself heavily on a rush-bottomed chair.

"I've lost it," he said stupidly, showing her his empty hands.

"Lost your wages? Oh, Lord, save us!"

"Lost your wages, you ass?" echoed the girl Nesta.

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"I've been in prison," said Paolino, heavily, as if he had not heard them. "We shall starve. They don't want me on the roads any more. They've done with me."

There was nothing heard for a few moments, but the shrill outcries of the woman and girl.

"Oh, my poor boy, my poor boy!" sobbed the mother.

"He's been in prison; he's done something; they wouldn't have sent him away otherwise!" said the little sister.

Paolino did not hear what either of them said.

"Father worked on these roads forty years," he muttered, "and I've been on them ever since I was breeched; and I'm not to go on them any more, and they won't say what I've done, and they put me in prison for asking."

"But the week's wage—the week's wage!" cried the mother. "Did you say you lost it?"

He nodded assent.

"He's drunk it away!" said the little sister. "Look at him. He's dead drunk. Can't you see, mother? He's drunk it all away."

"Oh, Nesta, for shame!" said the mother; but the thought was her own. These disordered clothes, these unwilling words, this improbable

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tale, this heavy, sullen, reddened face, were they not all due to drink? Rosina Sizzo would sooner have believed the church tower was walking across the hills than believe that her son could be dismissed from his labour on the roads which had been his father's before him.

Yes, it was drink. Her little daughter had said out the thought which she had herself no courage to put into words; she was so ashamed. She threw her gown over her head and leaned against the wall of the room, sobbing aloud. Nesta went up to her brother and shook him with both hands.

"Aren't you ashamed, you bibber? If you'd come to take me to the Corso as you promised, you wouldn't have got in this state, and lost your money through swilling wine in the town."

Paolino slowly raised his head and looked at her.

"Is that what you think, little girl? You're wrong. I've been good to you from your cradle, Nesta. You might have said something kinder. The trouble there is on me is more for you and the mother than it is for myself."

Then he rose, and pushing her aside, drank thirstily from a can of water and went up the

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rickety wooden stair to his bed. His mother cast the gown from her head and ran after him.

"Come and tell me all, my boy! Mother forgives; and the child is but a saucy ignorant minx."

But Paolino would not answer or open to her.

"'Tis drink, mother!" said Nesta, with her red lips curled in all the scorn of superior wisdom. "'Tis drink. You'll see in the morning."

But in the morning all the school children told Ernesta that they had heard their parents say overnight that her brother was one of some score of road-menders who had been dismissed through no fault of their own by the Commune.

In the morning also, when the girl was off to school, Paolino told his mother all which had taken place. The night's rest of sleep due to intense fatigue had calmed and sobered him.

"I must get some other work," he said, and went up to the tall white tower on the crest of the hill and spoke with the vicar.

"But I shall never be any good now that I'm sent off the roads," he said, with the great tears in his eyes.

The roads were to him like his ship to a

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sailor, his flag to a soldier. He could not believe that he was never again to keep them clean and watch the people go to and fro on them, and eat his noon-tide lump of bread under their flowering hedges, amongst their dock leaves and cuckoo-pint. Why had he been dismissed and others retained?

The vicar explained to him that it was a mere question of economy, and that the matter was regulated by seniority; but his little lupetto dog would have understood him better than his parishioner.

The good man also tried to influence the few influential people whom he knew, and himself petitioned the Municipality in favour of the young man; but he merely received the usual polite negative formalities in return, and nothing was altered. Paolino had been dismissed; for the authorities he was dead and buried.

He tried with all his might to get other work, but it was difficult to do so. A dismissal, even caused by no fault, but entirely based on the beautiful exactitude and unrelenting necessity of political economy, always is a black mark against a person's name, however zealously he or she may do their best to efface it.

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Paolino could not understand why Felice Bandone, an old schoolfellow, remained on the roads and he was turned off them. That was the only view of the question that he could be made to see. The injustice of it burdened him, hurt him, ate into him like a corrosive acid.

He did whatever work came to hand ; field-work, errands, driving a cart, carrying corn to the mill, hedging and ditching, or whatever it might be, but he did it with no pleasure in the labour. He took home his day's pay faithfully, but he had no joy in doing so ; he did not forget Nesta's words on the evening of his return. He had always been a light-hearted, mirthful, contented lad, now he was dull, slow, ill at ease. He had been in a prison van, in a prison cell, and it seemed to him as if the taint of them was always on him, on his lips, on his hands, on his soul ; and that others saw it.

"It is not the prison which taints us, it is the crime for which we go there," said the priest ; "you were really innocent of any offence, therefore you come out unsoiled, clean as a white pigeon."

But it was of no use to philosophize ; no reasoning could reach the mind of Paolino ; it

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was too simple, too unlearned, too obstinate. Wrong had been done him ; that was all he knew.

“Troubles,” as some one has said, “are gregarious ; they never come alone.” To add to his, Rosina fell ill. It was no definite malady, it was the giving way of the system under long toil and too poor nourishment. In the medical vocabulary this is called “marasma” ; the poor call it a “breaking up.” To Rosina, for her son to be sent off the roads was as great a blow as it was to him. It had been the patent of nobility of the Sizzo to be Communal road-menders one after another—father and son for generation after generation. They had always thought it a fine thing to serve the Commune ; they had always taken a special pride in their work, which was a public work, and in the highways, with their hedges, and shrines, and leafy corners, and grey walls, on which they worked from dawn to dusk. When her son lost his place on the road it was like the seeds of some mortal disease sown in her. She grew weaker and weaker, though she managed to keep the little house in order, and put the soup over the fire, and sew and spin a little. She grew more unwell every day ; and

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Paolino, so slow of comprehension in some things, was quick to see these signs of debility and decay. He did his utmost for her and for his thankless little sister ; but that all was very small, for the gains of a man at odd jobs, which was all he could get now, are never either considerable or certain. As *cantoniere* the weekly pay was sure and good, and the sense of being a public servant was a cause of pride and of respect from others. Every one is civil to a *cantoniere*, with his municipal badge—even though he be clearing up mud or rooting up nettles.

Now he was nothing ; a poor fellow, asking to be hired by those nearly as poor as himself. And he had lost all his pleasant acquaintances. He no longer saw the ladies and their dogs, the gentry and their horses, the drivers and shepherds and men in their little carts going to and fro the town. They might have been all dead for what he saw of them, working as he did in remote fields, or barns, or workshops, or mill-houses, and seeing nothing of who went by between the familiar hedgerows.

He got home late in the evening, and ate his frugal meal silently, and went to his bed of

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sacking under the roof, seeing very well that his sister had never forgiven him or altered her opinion as to the cause of their woes.

She was only fourteen, but she was shrewd, sharp, and selfish. He had tended to make her so by his indulgence, and the poisoned thorn which rankled in her soul was the knowledge that while a *cantoniere's* sister might have married fairly well, the sister of a day labourer seeking odd jobs might pine in vain for a suitor.

"Don't you see, Nesta, how ill mother looks?" he said to her one day.

"Who made her so?" said the girl, rudely.

"It is not my fault," said the poor lad, humbly.

"Not yours?" said Nesta, shrugging her shoulders. "You make the vicar believe so; but I'm not such a fool as he. They don't put people in prison for nothing."

"I will turn you out of the house if you dare say such things to me!" cried Paolino, white with rage and pain.

"They will put you in prison again if you do," said Nesta. "If I never marry, it will be your fault."

"Marry! You are a chit of a child."

"Nanna's Lena marries come Pentecost, and

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she is only a year older than I am," replied Nesta, with her face on fire with her wrongs. "And where shall I get a dower? Will you give me anything to buy my necklace with, or even to buy my clothes?"

She returned so perpetually to this theme, and rung the changes on it so persistently, that she ended in making her brother feel really guilty towards her; and she was so tall of her age, so precocious, and conceited, that she did really appear like a marriageable maiden to him.

"I have spoilt her chances," he said sadly, to his mother. "But, indeed, it was no fault of mine. Do—do—believe that, mother."

"I never doubted it for a moment, my dear," said Rosina, and she thought sincerely that she never had.

"Why should Felice be kept on and I sent off?" said Paolino, brooding on the greatest wrong of all.

His mother shook her head and groaned.

"Why, my dear lad, Felice's brother's brother-in-law, by a first marriage, is gardener to the syndic's daughter's husband's cousin. He could get a word spoken for him in high quarters; everything goes by favour and by having the

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right word said at the right minute to the right person. We haven't anybody to speak for us, except the vicar up yonder, and the clergy's word does more harm than good nowadays."

For Rosina, though illiterate and simple, was intelligent, and knew a little of how the world wagged beyond those hawthorn and hazel hedges which bounded the only sphere she had ever known.

"Nothing would matter," she said, with a heavy sigh, "if I were only as strong as I used to be. I am like a log on you now."

"No, mother ; no, no," said Paolino, with a sob in his throat. His heart was full ; he wanted to say so much, but he did not know how to put his feelings into words. His mother could speak well, but he had never been able to do so. He had only been able to keep his roads in good order, and that they would not let him do any longer.

Rosina at last grew so weak that they called in the parish doctor, who said little but ordered medicines and good food, strong broth and wines.

He might as well have ordered the stars down from the skies.

Paolino sold his father's silver watch to get

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the medicine, but that was not of much use without nourishment, and they could not buy it. And if they could have bought it they would not have known how to cook it.

"You will be well again, mother, when the warm weather comes," said Paolino.

"Let us hope so, dear," said Rosina. But in her own mind she thought, "When the heat does come it will finish me."

And she lay awake tormented by anxiety for her children. Paolino had lost his sheet-anchor, and would drift nobody could say how or where, and Nesta was a young creature who without control would in all likelihood go very far wrong.

"Oh, let me live! Let me live!" prayed the poor mother.

But those prayers were not heard. There are so many similar.

And one night in the hot, windless, summer which she had dreaded, she died, so quietly that the girl Nesta, sleeping on the same mattress, was not awakened from her sound child-like slumber, and, waking at sunrise, found herself beside a corpse. Her shrieks brought Paolino indoors, reaching his ears as he mounted the hill path behind the house to go to a day's work in

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the pine woods. He had found no work for four days.

His grief was less violent than Nesta's, but it was intense. It froze him into sullenness and silence, as his dismissal from the Commune had done. She was dead, and it was his fault.

The priest came, and the doctor to certify the death; he sat stolidly by the bed and did not speak to them.

At last, frightened by his look and his silence, the vicar touched his arm.

"Shall the parish bury her, dear boy?" he asked gently. "You know, to-morrow, at latest."

Paolino sprang to his feet.

"No," he said, with a furious oath. "No. She always said, 'When I die, bury me decently. Don't let the parish touch me. I have been a decent woman.' No, the parish shall not touch her."

"Have you the means?" said the priest. "Something I can contribute, but little; you know I am very poor."

Paolino looked wildly around the room. There were only a few pence in the house.

"I will find the means," he said hoarsely.

"It will waste the money, Paolino," said

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Nesta, between her sobs. "The parish would do what was right."

He cast a glance at her of scorn and loathing ; then, with one long look at the figure on the bed, he left the chamber.

"I hope he will do nothing rash," said the priest, uneasily.

"He will go and get drunk," said Nesta, lighting a little oil wick under a print of the Madonna.

"Hush !" said the priest, severely, pointing to the bed.

Paolino went up first to the loft where he slept, took his Sunday clothes, and rolled them up in a bundle. Then he went downstairs, set the ladder against the wall where his plum tree grew, and began to gather the plums. These were the largest number which the tree had yet borne. He had kept them carefully from rot and caterpillar and his sister's eager fingers. He had always said to himself, "They shall be for mother. They shall get her good food as far as they can."

He had intended to gather them on the following Sunday and take them and sell them in the town, and bring her back meat and wine.

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And now he meant to sell them to help to bury her. To keep her from the pauper funeral she had dreaded.

They would not bring very much, but perhaps, he thought, with what his clothes would fetch, it would suffice.

When gathered they filled a goodly basket—beautiful, golden, cleanly fruit, free from bruise or blemish.

The women who came to lay out the dead saw him on the ladder, and cried out—

“What! At work, and your mother scarce cold on her bed? Fie! For shame of you, Paolino!”

But he heeded them not, and gathered every plum off the tree.

Then he took up the basket and the bundle and walked towards the town gate, from which he was distant about two miles.

He walked quickly over the dust of the hot summer day. It was early still, and he passed people he knew going towards the town, but he took no notice of them. At the gate there was a great press and a great struggle, the string of carts, live cattle and poultry, loads of wood and straw, numbers of country people

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with eggs and butter, vegetables, homespun linen.

Here he was made to wait a long time. When his plums were at last weighed and the duty on them paid, the sun was much higher in the heavens.

At last he was allowed to pass and go down the long ancient street leading to the centre of the town, where the greatest traffic was found. The thought struck him that if he could sell them, not in the market, but to passers-by or at the doors of houses, he would make more money by them, for market prices are always low. His plums were fine, and would take the eye and the fancy of ladies and children. So as he drew near the end of the street he began to cry, "Plums! Fine plums! Who will buy plums to-day?"

He was a good-looking lad, like the young men of Signorelli at Orvieto, and his eyes were so brimful of sadness, of a grief which could not weep and would not speak, that women, as they passed, turned and looked at him, and two of them bought a vine leaf laden with plums from his basket. Seeing that, others came out of their shop doors and bought also, so that before

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he had got quite to the end of the street his basket was nearly empty, and the buyers had not beaten down the price, but had nearly all paid liberally.

He had a whole handful of copper money, and one young girl, a milliner, passing by with a band-box, had taken some plums and slipped a franc in his hand, because his sad wistful eyes were like those of a man she loved, who was in Africa.

With not more than a pound of fruit left in his basket, he went on to the bridge, raising his harmless cry to attract the attention of passing citizens. If he got a good price for his clothes, he thought he would be able to pay for the coffin at once, and they would wait, with the priest's aid, for the fees and the ground.

With his eyes he saw the people moving around him, and the sun shining on the pavement, and the water gliding under the bridge ; but with his brain he only saw the pale dead face of his mother, and with his ear he only heard her voice.

Mechanically, he continued to cry aloud, "Plums ! Fine plums ! Who will buy ?"

Hearing that cry, two Communal Guards,

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coming over the bridge, turned and looked at him and spoke to one another. A little child had just stopped her father before the plum basket, which Paolino had lowered on to the stones that she might be able to see into it, when the guards stopped in front of him.

"You have licence to sell in the streets?" said one of them. Paolino looked up, not comprehending the question, and his face grew dark and hard as he saw by their garb who they were. They repeated the question angrily.

"The fruit is my own. I grew it," he answered, and bent down to sort for the child a dozen plums. With a stroke of his sword one of the guards turned the basket over and sent the remaining fruit rolling in the dust.

"You are selling in the streets without licence. You must come with us," they said to him; and without more preface put their hands on his collar, one on each side of him.

The little child screamed, the passers-by stopped, the traffic was suspended.

"What has the lad done?" asked a foreigner.

"That is no business of yours," said the guards.

A brigadier, hastening up, explained.

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"He is disturbing the public and hawking fruit without a licence, therefore he must come before the Commissary. We have his name down ; he is dangerous ; he was in trouble, and disorderly, a few months ago."

Paolino stood between his captors, breathing hard, like a young bull tied to a stake.

"Let me go ; let me go," he muttered. "It is for her burial. She died in the night. Let me go !"

There was a murmur of sympathy from the people who had gathered round.

"Let him go," said several voices. "Some one is dead. Let him go."

"Yes, she is dead !" he cried, turning to his unknown friends. "They took me up before for no fault, and it killed her. I did no harm then ; I do not do any now. Tell them to let me go, or she will be buried like a pauper, and it was the one thing she feared—the one thing she prayed against. Tell them to let me go !"

A tiger may let go, a crocodile or a python may let go their prey, but not a Communal guard. His captors heard the ominous murmur of protest in the momentarily increasing throng. Two drew their revolvers and pointed them at his

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head ; the third, with a rapid, unforeseen movement, tied his hands behind him.

"He is an anarchist," said the crowd, and fell back a little, their sympathies chilled, their personal terrors awakened.

"Let me go ; let me go !" screamed Paolino. "I am doing no wrong. The fruit is my own. I planted the tree. Help me ! Help me ! Good people, help me ! She died last night ! I must go and bury her. My mother ! My mother ! Oh, Lord !"

But the fickle support of the populace had already abandoned him and left him to his fate.

The guards gagged him and drove him between them over the bridge. The last plums, which had rolled against the footway, were picked up and eaten by ragged boys.

When he was taken before the Commissary that official recognized him.

"Again, so soon !" he said severely. "You must be a confirmed law-breaker."

When he did not return to his home, his little sister said—

"There ! did I not tell you ? He is lying drunk in some ditch."

The poor dead woman was buried by the parish.

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The money for the plums found on him had been confiscated by the authorities. When Paolino's trial came on he appeared imbecile. He was sentenced to three days' imprisonment for having hawked fruit in the streets without a licence ; but he was condemned to seven months' imprisonment for disorderly conduct, and resistance to the police, though he had made none.

This is how anarchists are begotten and multiplied by law.

RUFFO AND
RUFF

RUFFO AND RUFF

RUFFO was only twelve years of age, but he remembered so many, many things, which had no likeness to anything in his present existence, that he thought he must be very old indeed. He never spoke of these unforgotten things to any one except Ruff, when they were together at night in the straw of some stable or the lumber of some loft. Ruff was always deeply interested, having a past of his own of which he could not speak, but which was always making a faithful and tender heart ache wistfully.

What Ruffo remembered were blue seas, sweet-smelling hills, big golden fruits, a hut among the tamarisks, a woman who set him astride on her neck and shoulders and ran with him into the salt and sparkling foam, laughing and singing, and lifting her face to his kisses. Who was she? What were they? When had it all been?

Sometimes on dirty stalls, in the ugly English streets with gas-jets glaring over them, he saw

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the round yellow fruits which he had played with amongst the flowers—poor oranges in exile, so wrinkled, so dusty, so closely crammed in crates or baskets, with the gas instead of the sun shining on them. When he saw them he always remembered more of the country of his birth, and cried himself to sleep, with Ruff's paws clasped round his neck.

He had been born in a village near Reggio, in Calabria, and his name was Ruffo Anillino. So much was on the municipal paper given with him, which changed hands as he changed masters.

He had been very little when his father had been drowned in a hurricane, and his mother had a year later died of cholera, and those relatives who remained sold him to a foreign trader who dealt in children, and who took him away in a ship.

That he did not recollect clearly, for he had been sold many times since then, and had been miserable always, and beaten and hungry, and dragged through various countries and into many cities and towns, so that his mind was a dull, confused grey mass, in which only his earliest memories were clear and sweet.

He was very small for his age, for he had

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never had enough to eat ; very pale and thin, with big dark eyes, which had the same patient, tired sadness in them as had Ruff's, the Toby-dog.

They both belonged to a Punch and Judy show—a poor show—which was always moving from place to place, and was never invited to exhibit in houses at children's parties, but found its public at country fairs and in common streets, by wharf-sides and on village greens.

It was, perhaps, not worse for him than if he had been sold to the sulphur mines, as so many thousands of children are sold in Sicily ; but he was sold, as utterly as they are, and was as helpless as any poor pony in the coal-pits, or any hapless ass turning a merry-go-round at a school feast, or beaten by excursionists in Epping Forest, or on Hampstead Heath. He did not even dream of trying to end his servitude ; he had not the faintest notion of where to go or what to seek ; he knew nothing of any kind : his only art was to make Punch play when his owners were too drunk to do so, or, when they took the show themselves, to grind the barrel-organ and blow on the Pandean pipes.

But with these people his unhappy little lot was less wretched than it had been before.

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When they drank they beat him, but when they were sober they were not unkind. He liked the wandering life better than the organ-grinding in London and other big towns; and then there was Ruff, his comrade, his consoler, his fellow-sufferer, and fellow-slave.

Ruff was a little silver-grey Skye terrier. He had been a happy and handsome little dog once, who had slept on ladies' laps and on carriage cushions, played on green lawns and eaten sugar, worn silver bells and known pet names; but the young girl who had loved him had died in her eighteenth year. Her parents, with true human selfishness, gave him away, because the sight of him increased their pain. Naturally, he escaped from the big strange London house to which he was taken, and tried to find his old home and was lost in the maze of the stony streets of Belgravia and clawed up by the Punch man, whose Toby had died three days before. He was shaved and faked that he might not be known, kept on a chain, thrashed, and dressed, and forced to play. His heart and his spirit were broken, but he did not die. Dogs, like men, often call on death in vain.

One day a little pale, dark-eyed, shivering lad

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was brought by his owners to share his misery, and from that day Ruffo and Ruff consoled each other.

When they were beaten they crept away and kissed each other, and the pain seemed less. When their stomachs were empty and their bodies cold, they clung to each other in the straw, and sobbed themselves to sleep. When there was any sun, and there had been any food, and in the rests between the exhibitions the puppets lay in their box, and the man and his wife were at the alehouse, Ruffo and Ruff strayed away by themselves unnoticed on some gorse-covered common, down some lonely lane, through some cowslip meadows, or over some tracks of heather. Often stones were thrown at them, sometimes they were kicked through a hedge, often they were told that these fields and commons "weren't for the likes of them ;" but at other times some good-natured woman gave them a drink of milk, some cottage girl a bit of bread, or an old labourer, resting his rheumatism in the sun, shared with them his rusty bacon and crusty loaf.

"Why, yee and yer cur ain't nought but skin and bone," said an old gaffer once. "Play actin' is ye? Ay, that's a bad trade."

"Would they take us on one of the farms, do you think, sir?" asked Ruffo in his plaintive broken English.

"Naw, they oodn't, child," said the old man, pleased to be called "sir." "Ye'd not be a scrap o' use, and farmers doan't cotton to furriners."

"Are we furriners?" asked Ruffo, vaguely understanding the disqualification.

"Ees, yee be—leastways, dawg I dawn't know; but there's no doubt ye've some tarnation lingo o' yer own, my lad; ye speak so mighty queer."

"Do I, sir?" asked Ruffo, sorrowfully; he could not see in what his speech differed from that of the natives. "Ruff is English," he added, in the hope that his companion would find more favour than himself.

But the labourer shook his head.

"Dawgs they hev a bad time o't nowadays. He's a play-actin' dawg is yourn; he aren't a ratter; nobody 'd take him nowhere."

"What is a ratter, Ruff?" asked Ruffo, as they went away under the shade of hawthorn trees. Ruff did not know. Before this miserable time of "play-actin'," he had been always with his dear young mistress, driving behind her

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ponies, trotting in her shadow, leaping to catch her tennis-ball, running to pick up her glove, sleeping on her pretty white bed.

His soft dark eyes, so like Ruffo's own, looked up woefully; they said as plainly as words could have done, "Oh, if I could tell you about her! Oh, why did she die, and leave me?"

He trotted on slowly and sadly by Ruffo's side, thinking wistfully and wearily, as dogs do think so often, of a life which they have loved and lost. He wondered, as Ruffo wondered, where had it all been? When had it all been? What had he done that he should be so cruelly punished? Where was his dear Lady Helen? He remembered lying on her bed during her illness, and being frightened because at the last she was so cold and silent; and being carried away by force from her side, and locked up in a distant room by the housekeeper; and after that he had never seen her again, and he had been sent away from the home where he had been so happy with her, though he did not think he had done anything wrong to deserve such punishment; he had heard them say she was dead. What did "dead" mean?

Ruff's little mind worried over all these

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questions, and memories, and sorrows, as he went down the green cart-track under the hawthorns, even as Ruffo's mind wandered back to the shining silver sands, and the blue water, and the green boughs with their fruit of gold, and the smiling face of the young mother, rosy and warm with the sun. Neither of them could clearly understand what they had lost, or why they had lost it, but their hearts ached none the less for that.

Then, after an hour or two of freedom and peace, they returned to their bondage; to the whip, and the drudgery, and the toil of the performances in the lanes and streets of the small boroughs, where the show was most welcome.

But these brief hours of peace and liberty kept them alive; kept them from sinking under the privations and punishments which were their daily lot, for though they both tried to do their best, Todd and his wife were never contented, and were almost always more or less in drink.

Whenever the receipts were meagre, both Ruffo and Ruff were beaten, though it was no fault of theirs if the audience was a scanty one or the neighbourhood very poor.

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More than once Todd had been fined for cruelty to them ; but that did no good either to the boy or the dog. He paid the money, but they paid in added pain.

"Pray, sir, don't summon him," said Ruffo one day to a benevolent person, indignant to see the wheals and cuts on the child's skin. "He only gives it us worse the more he has to pay."

"But he should have a month in gaol!" said the philanthropist.

"And when he came out, sir, he'd kill us both, sir."

"But I would put you in an industrial school, where he could not get at you."

"And Ruff, please?"

"Oh, the dog! The dog would be taken by the police."

"Then I'll stay with Todd," said Ruffo, and, to the gentleman's indignant surprise, he took to his heels as fast as he could run, followed closely by Ruff, and darted into a dark alley and was lost to sight.

To Ruffo's relief, Todd left that little town the same afternoon, having taken fright at questions that had been asked of him there concerning his right to the child.

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"I bought him. Didn't I buy him, the little dirty wretch?" he said to his wife. "Gave three good yellow-boys for him, and that's two more than he's wuth—lazy forrin scum as he be."

Mrs. Todd demurred. To her Ruffo was very useful; she made him cook and sweep, and fetch and carry, and buy drink for her unknown to her husband, and even wash her clothes in running water; and he was such a little fool she could make him do anything if she gave the dog a good meal.

"He'd rayther the dawg ate than eat hisself," she said to her friends. "He must be a dratted, half-witted little simpleton. Never seed a lad in all my days as 'ud rayther a dawg ate than eat hisself."

But however foolish he might be, he was well worth the three pounds he had cost to his owners.

If he could only get back to the sun and the sea and the oranges, and take Ruff there! Alas! he did not know it, but he had little brothers and cousins yonder, where the oranges grew, as ill off as himself and, perhaps, worse off; little fair-haired slaves of the sulphur, little

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Carusi, half-naked, half-blind, toiling up and down all day long with the blistering mineral on their backs, sold into bondage as he had been, and seeing no hope or likelihood of deliverance from one year's end to the other. Poor little *Carusi* ! They only saw the sun through their smarting, reddened eyes ; the lizards played on the grass, but they toiled from dawn to dark ; the oranges grew ripe in the warm sea wind, but no drop of the juice of the fruit moistened their parched cracked lips ; poor slaves of the great grinding wheel of Commerce, born where all Nature is glad, except themselves, and the weary, footsore mules who toil with them.

But Ruffo knew nothing of their fate ; he only knew his own troubles and Ruff's, as they trudged along the dust and the slush of English roads, in company with Punch and Judy. Ruffo pushed a hand-cart on which the show, taken to pieces, was packed ; and when Todd was not with them, or was in a good humour, he made Ruff a bed on the cart to save his tired feet, for Ruff got soon foot-sore, having all his previous life been used to running on garden lawns and in grassy lanes,

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and to being driven about lying on carriage cushions.

The hand-cart was heavy, and the roads were usually bad from either drought or rain, and the child's strength was exceedingly small. One day he and the cart reached a little town on the western border of Hampshire, seven miles from the sea ; it was ancient and cheerful and quiet, with its streets touching fields and woods, and its scanty population neighbourly and kind. Todd had relations there, and stayed longer than it was his usual habit to remain in one place, and Ruffo and Ruff had time to grow popular there. Their owners were jealous, and apprehensive of interference ; but even they saw that it was in their interests to let the boy and the dog become friends with those inclined to befriend them. Mrs. Todd contented herself with emptying Ruffo's pockets whenever she could, and giving Ruff nothing at all to eat, alleging that he got so much from other folks that he grew fat and lazy.

"I'll teach you to go a-whining to folks as if ye weren't fed," said Mrs. Todd, so that the more fortunate he was in getting something to eat from the public pity the more unfortunate

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was he in incurring her wrath and feeling it likewise on his poor little bones.

The Todds had a good many old friends in and around this place, and Ruffo and Ruff obtained more leisure than usual because the performances were less frequent than in larger and less hospitable neighbourhoods. Punch and Judy remained undisturbed in their box, and the boy and the dog could escape into the pleasant country round about the little borough. One morning early they had got out thus into the country whilst their owners were sleeping the heavy sleep of the drunkard. The air was sweet and fresh, for it was midsummer; birds sang; cattle standing in shallow reaches of reedy water looked so contented and peaceful that Ruffo wished he were one of them. It was an old-fashioned bit of rural England, with thatched houses hidden in orchards, and a tall spire rising amidst tall elms, and sandy roads, narrow and grass-grown running up and down under overhanging hawthorns and high banks fragrant with flowers. Ruffo felt the peace of it all sink into his little tired soul.

Ruff rambled a little here and there, eating a blade or two of dog grass, paddling his often

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cracked and sore little feet in the rivulets of water, remembering just such lanes as this, or just such mornings as this, when he had been Lady Helen's pet, with his silver bell on his blue ribbon. When had that been? Why could he never find that place? Why, in all his wanderings, could he never see it again? What makes dogs suffer so much and so long is the great constancy of their affections and tenacity of their memories, coupled to that cruel bondage, and the impossibility of following their instincts, in which nine out of ten of them spend their unpitied lives.

Ruffo was thinking how glad he would be if they both could get taken on one of these farms which looked so pleasant to him, and of whose bereaved cow-mothers in their stalls, and poor calf-children sent to slaughter, and hardly-worked carthorses, and starved sheep, dogs, and chickens choked with crammed gullets, and poisoned blackbirds and mavis in the orchards he knew nothing: the green fields looked so fresh and cool and quiet, the sheep so white and fat, the great stacks of corn so promising of plenty.

In the midst of his reverie a thing of steel,

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half-beast, half-bird, all made of metal, whizzed down the grassy lane and knocked him over, grazed him, maimed him, and vanished, a shrill, unkind laugh whistling through the air.

Ruff, roused from his reverie, dashed after the offender with an angry volley of barks ; but the bicycle was already out of sight in the green haze of the leafy distance.

Ruff ran back to his fallen friend and covered him with kisses, whining eloquently.

"It doesn't hurt much," said Ruffo to console him, though showers of sparks seemed to fill the air, and a buzzing like a swarm of bees was in his ears ; he felt himself anxiously all over. If anything in him were broken, what would his master say to him? They would drive him away, or send him to a hospital, he thought, and then what would happen? He would never see Ruff: Ruff would be taken away with the show to who could tell what villages or towns and unknown places.

"I think I'm quite whole, Ruff ; he didn't break me," he said, after stretching and pinching each of his limbs, as he had seen men do when they had a fall or an accident ; he ached all over, but he had no bones fractured or

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sprained. "How glad I am it wasn't you, Ruff!—it would have killed you, the wicked byke!" he murmured to the dog, who whined again, but now, with pleasure, leaping up into his arms.

A large shadow loomed across the sunlit turf of the lane.

"What be you a-doin' here? Tramps, I reckon," said a big, burly man who came through a break in the hedge; he was one of the policemen of the town, but he had his house and his family under the hawthorn trees in this lane.

Ruffo knew what "tramp" meant; he hurried to pull off his little shabby hat, and answer.

"Oh no, sir, we are not tramps," he said, in very frightened tones. "Ruff is dog Toby, and I'm the pipes."

"What rot's that?" bawled the man.

"Please, sir, it's truth," said Ruffo, piteously. "If you ask for Mr. Todd at the——"

"Ye're Todd's brat, are you?" said the giant, standing over them in grim contempt. "Todd's a blaggard, and ye're a little rip; been stealin' eggs, I'll be bound. Let me catch ye at it!"

Ruffo's small brown thin face grew red. At

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times, when there was a safe occasion Todd made him get inside fowl-houses and bring him out eggs, or even a plump pullet. He did not like doing it—he never did it on his own account—but it was always with Todd a question of prompt obedience or the stick ; and Todd, who was shrewd, had come to perceive that it hurt Ruffo more to see Ruff beaten than it did to be beaten himself.

“ Let me catch ye at it ! ” said the big man, savagely ; and to confirm his threat he took Ruffo’s ragged jacket in his hand, lifted him up by it, and shook him.

Ruffo screamed, for he already felt sore and aching all over from his fall. Ruff flew at the constable’s legs.

“ Down, Ruff—oh dear, Ruff, don’t !—pray, pray, pray don’t ! ” he cried in terror ; for it was not the first time that Ruff had taken his part and suffered cruelly for it.

“ Get out, you vermin ! ” said the man, and gave a kick which would have brained or crippled the little dog if he had not dodged it and got between Ruffo’s ankles, growling and waiting for attack.

Ruffo fell on his knees.

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"Kill me, sir ! I don't mind. Do kill me, if you like ; but pray, pray don't hurt Ruff. He doesn't mean to be rude. He only wants to take care of me."

"Ye're a pretty pair !" said the man ; but he took his hand off Ruffo's jacket. "Todd 'll hear my mind about ye."

Ruffo shivered ; but he was silent, pressing his knees convulsively upon Ruff's sides to keep him quiet.

"Ye'll be in gaol afore new moon, and yer little beast 'll get his dose of arsenic," said the man. "Hi, be off with ye both, or I won't answer to keep my hands off of ye."

Ruffo stumbled stupidly on to his feet, caught Ruff in his arms, and took to flight as fast as his aching limbs would let him go over the grassy wheel-tracks of the steep country lane.

He clasped Ruff to his chest closer and closer as he stumbled on his way, hugging him so tightly that the little dog was half stifled. But they were both safe for the present hour.

The big burly man looked after them with unfriendly eyes.

"Long's muzzlin' regulation 'll soon be coming round to us," he said to himself, "and then

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we'll pay 'em out—the dirty little furrin brat and his durned cur : there ought to be one law all over the country for vagabones and dawgs.”

Ruffo and Ruff reached the pothouse where Todd and his wife, and Punch and his wife, were housed on the outskirts of the little rural town, and got back to the loft in which they slept before the absence of either had been noticed by their owners. In an hour's time they went out with the show and with Mrs. Todd alone, for her husband was still sleeping off his drink ; Ruff imprisoned in his usual costume, and Ruffo staggering under the weight of the theatre.

It was a fine evening, with a south wind after rain ; many people were out in their cottage gardens or strolling along the roads and streets. It was known that it was one of their last appearances in that town, and they had considerable success. Ruffo's back and limbs ached terribly ; but he tried not to think about them, and played on the pipes with as much spirit as though he had been a little fairy making music in the glades of Arcady. Ever and again he looked up at Ruff above him on the platform of the show, and smiled at him ;

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and Ruff looked down and wagged his tail where it peeped out from under the little red coat in which he was dressed, so sadly to his own discomfort.

When the performance was ended Ruff walked about amongst the people holding a little tray strapped to his right paw. It was the part of all his compulsory duties which he hated the most. To stand, or walk erect, is always very painful to any dog, and strains their muscles cruelly, and Ruff was wounded in his pride as well ; he could not endure to beg, he who had been Lady Helen's darling, and had the blue blood of Scotland in his veins. Ruffo also could never bear to see him in that cap and coat, begging, to the laughing, jeering, unkind idlers, and as soon as he dared he slipped in through the throng, and unstrapped the tray from the little dog's paw, and went round himself, to spare his friend, and the tray was soon heavy with pence, and there were even a few sixpences and threepenny-bits amongst them that evening.

Ruffo's face always touched the well-springs of pity in the hearts of some of the mothers ; it was such a wan and weary little face, with its

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great starry eyes, and the thick auburn curls, dusty and tangled, above the low brow.

"He looks homesick, he dew," said one of the matrons. "Yer come from over seas, don't ye, little man?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Ruffo, humbly : he knew that he had been brought over a wild waste of waters, and that they called those waters a sea.

The good soul went into a baker's shop and bought some stale rolls and a square of gingerbread, and shoved them into Ruffo's pocket.

"Eat 'em when ye get home, child ; ye look more'n half-starved."

Ruffo's eyes glistened ; for once he hoped he and Ruff would have enough to eat when they went to bed.

But Mrs. Todd was looking at him from where she stood in the distance, guarding the theatre and the puppets. He was never allowed to keep anything that the public gave him. He might learn to get habits of independence. She wrenched the bread and cake away from him as soon as she could do so unseen, and then boxed his ears because he burst out crying, and cuffed Ruff because in sympathy he howled.

"Gived yer, was it? Yer own, was it? I'll

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teach yer to think as the likes o' you can have proputtty!" she said viciously, and drummed on his head with the wooden money-tray.

And Ruff and he were sent supperless to their bed in the straw.

"That good woman said 'home,' Ruff—what is 'home'?" said Ruffo, hugging his fellow-victim in the dark. "We haven't any home, Ruff, you and I haven't any."

Ruff would have said, if he could have spoken: "We have made a home in each other's heart."

They sobbed themselves to sleep; the painful, restless, fitful sleep of those whose stomachs are empty; and Ruffo dreamed of the bright blue sea and the shining sand, and the feathery tamarisks, and Ruff dreamed of his lost little lady as he had seen her last—so white, so still, with her golden hair lying on the pillows, and her motionless hands crossed on her chest, the small soft hands which had never touched him save to caress.

Who cared what dreams they had, or what hunger they felt, a little Italian beggar boy, and a dog Toby?

Ruffo was sorry when, a few days later, he

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heard Todd say that they should move on the day after the morrow. Todd seldom stayed long in any place ; he was nowhere popular with authority, and small thefts from poultry yards and fruit gardens and rabbit hutches were always more frequent in any neighbourhood he honoured with his presence.

" 'Tis fine bright weather, and we'll best move on across the Dossetshire border," Ruffo heard him say to his wife, who demurred that they were doing very well where they were.

" Ay, ay, well enough ; but 'tis allers best to keep moving," said Todd.

Movement was agreeable to Todd ; he went third class by rail himself everywhere, and left his "old woman" to toil on foot as she might, driving on Ruffo before her ; sometimes getting a lift on a carrier's cart, but not often, being afraid to let her little slaves out of her sight.

" He may go and hide somewheres with that dawg," she said to herself. " Child'en is that ongrateful."

But for four days more they were to remain in this friendly little town, with its grass-grown hilly streets and its square church tower where the owls built, and its sweet scents of hay, and

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of strawberries blown in from the surrounding country.

The little town had a market, and a market day, when there were many country people, and much open-air traffic, and loud bleating of frightened sheep, and lowing of calves, and cackling of hens, and crowing of barndoor monarchs, and heaps of fresh vegetables and sheaves of herbs and big bunches of homely roses, wall-flowers, and clove pinks.

Above the market stalls with their leathern awnings and wooden trestles there was a blue sky, and it made that vague but unforgotten past stir in Ruffo's mind as he stared up at it. It was so seldom he saw a blue sky now ; and then, by that train of connecting thoughts to which learned people give a long name, there came back to him the memories of the seashore, and the orange boughs, and the laughing face of his mother, and he ceased to see anything that was actually around him.

"Was there iver yer like? Drat ye fur dream-in' and gapin'! Wake up, and custoom the dawg!" screamed Jane Todd in his ear.

Ruffo started and opened frightened eyes upon the scene before him ; the low homely

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houses, the ranges of stalls and skips and barrows, the country folks jostling one another ; the solemn grey church closing one end of the square. He took up Ruff tenderly and put on his little red coat, his frill, and his cap and feather, then kissed the little dog upon his nose to lessen the humiliation. No amount of usage ever made his travesty less hateful to poor Ruff, and his eyes as dark and almost as large as Ruffo's own, and equally full of wondering dumb sorrow, gazed woefully out from the shade of the plumed cap which was tied under his chin, and which, he felt, made him look so ridiculous.

Some street boys were looking on and laughing and pointing at him. Ruffo made haste to disappear with him behind the drapery of the show.

"There is nothing to mock at us for, darling Ruffie!" he murmured to his fellow-sufferer. "Oh, if I could only run in on them with a knife!"

For Ruffo had slumbering in him, though chilled and slackened by privation and fear, the hot blood of southern mariners who had been wont for generations to pay affronts with steel. When the English children grinned and pointed

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at his beloved four-footed friend he felt all his hot blood boil in his little jaded, tired body. He was a gentle little soul, with almost all spirit beaten out of him, but he came of a fiery and dauntless race, and he would not have been a Calabrian if he had not felt a jeer still more unendurable than a blow.

"Laugh! Laugh! Laugh!" he said, with his small white teeth clenched; "laugh, you boors, you asses! You are not worth one hair of Ruff's head!"

"What bosh be yer a-mutterin'?" said Mrs. Todd. "Why, them boys could smash yer in a jiffey, as if yer was a dumbledore. Yer mind and keep a civil tongue in yer 'ead. 'Tis well for ye as yer speaks so queer like as yer bain't easy onderstood. 'Ere, give me the dawg and get yer out with the music."

Ruffo obeyed, for her heavy hands pushed him outside the curtain, and the pipes and the triangle duly announced the approaching performance of Mr. Punch, whilst Mrs. Todd within grasped Ruff and the puppets to begin the familiar, but ever-attractive tragedy. At the sound of the "music" the street boys, already in front of the show, were joined by others;

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children ran from all quarters, servants who had their market baskets well filled upon their arms stopped on their way home ; waggoners, carters, yokels, and idlers joined the throng, and even the market-women under their awnings turned their heads towards Mr. Punch's temple, and momentarily forgot their customers and remembered their childhood.

Suddenly a big man strode through the crowd and up to the little theatre.

"Stop that 'ere performance," he said, in a loud, authoritative voice. "Dawg aren't muzzled."

Ruffo lifted his eyes and ceased to blow on the Pandean pipe and jingle the triangle.

He recognized the man who had collared and threatened him in the lane ten days before.

"Stop that 'ere performance," repeated the man ; "muzzle the dawg !"

Muzzle Toby ! The throng laughed jeeringly, but murmured. Punch was popular, the policeman was not.

"Muzzle the dawg," said the Jack-in-office ; "matter o' public safety. Wheer's the owner ?"

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Ruffo threw the triangle down on the stones and darted between the curtains.

"Oh, ma'am! oh, ma'am! They're after Ruff! Give him to me and let me run!"

"What?" bawled Mrs. Todd, who did not understand.

It was the moment of dog Toby's ever-effective appearance, and she clutched him fiercely round the throat. Ruffo clasped him round the body; Ruff struggled to get out of the woman's hands and escape to his friend. The red rough face of the constable showed itself at the aperture over the limp forms of Punch and of Judy lying prone upon their wooden platform.

"Stop this 'ere performance," repeated the constable, "leastways, till yer dawg be muzzled."

"Muzzled? What rot be ye a-talkin'?" said Mrs. Todd, her head and shoulders with Ruff clutched under her arm appearing above the bodies of Punch and Judy.

"Rot? I'll see yer rotted!" said the guardian of the public weal. "Law kem down 'ere last night. My lords' horders. Board o' Agricultur'. Every dawg en the County to be muzzled for a year: wire muzzle. What's yer name? Wheer's

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yer 'abitation? What's yer callin'? Wheer's yer receipt for dog-tax?"

"He ain't a dog; he's a Toby!" screamed Mrs. Todd. "He can't act if he's muzzled. Irvin' hisself couldn't act in a muzzle, ye know that, man. Git away and let the show go on——"

"I'll run yer in at onst, with yer cur and yer little shaver, if ye don't kip a civil tongue in yer head," yelled the man in authority.

The crowd behind him, though still laughing, began to mutter rebelliously.

"Dog can't act if ye strap his mouth up," said a sturdy blacksmith; "and there ought to be some notice aforehand to the public."

"Don't yer cheek me, or it'll be the wuss for ye," said the constable, turning round ominously. "The law's the law, and shell be respecket as long as I'm in the force. Ye all o' ye know Job Perrett. Woman, what's yer callin'? Where's yer receipt for dog-tax?"

"Woman? *Me?* Hoity-toity!" screamed Jane Todd in great wrath, but inwardly quaking and quailing, and throttling poor Ruff under her bony arm. "And Lord! sakes, Mr. Perrett! ye knows us well enow. We've a-bin this round

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full twenty year, if one, my man and me ; and as for this pore little Toby—— Hold yer row, child, can't ye? Ye'll only make matters worse."

These last words she whispered savagely to Ruffo, who clung to her skirts and to Ruff.

"Let 'em go on! Let 'em go on!" shouted several people in the crowd.

"'Tain't fair to stop 'em in the middle," said the sturdy smith.

Another constable came up.

"Ye can summon 'em, Job. Summon 'em. That'll do."

"Ay, that'll do," said the crowd.

"There's lots o' dogs loose. Take 'em first," chimed Mrs. Todd. "This pore little Toby can't hurt nobody."

"We'll take 'em up, all on 'em, don't ye fear," said Job Perrett, grimly. "But this 'ere Toby-dog's a vicious cur, and dangerous to the public safety. He's a'out a muzzle in a public place. The law's the law, aren't it the law, Garge?"

George, who was his fellow-constable, assented somewhat unwillingly.

"Summon 'em. That'll do," he said again, for the crowd was getting more and more out

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of temper, ill-pleased with the muzzling order in all its aspects, and irritated at having the show stopped. At this moment Ruff succeeded in his frantic struggles to free himself from the suffocating grasp of Jane Todd, and even from the beloved hands of Ruffo. He had recognized Ruffo's enemy of the hawthorn lane, and leaped on to the little platform where the fallen forms of Punch and Judy were lying, and flew at the constable, his whole little person quivering with rage, his eyes blazing, and his small white teeth gleaming. Job Perrett sprang backwards in a paroxysm of terror, and the crowd, delighted, cheered the dog. Ruff, for the moment victorious, stood upon the ledge barking and growling furiously, his frill trembling in his spasms of rage, his cap and feather fallen on the ground, his tail vibrating in fury beyond the lappets of the coat. He paid no heed to Ruffo's prayers and trembling appeals ; he had driven back a foe ; he was pleased and glad once more after so many miserable years.

"Ye're a good pluckt one, ye are !" shouted the smith ; and the crowd cheered the little dog again, and pelted the policemen with derisive names.

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Ruff was very small, but in these moments he looked almost as large as a lion, where he stood above the prostrate puppets, with his head held up in fearless wrath, challenging his foe to come near him again if he dared.

"Summon 'em, summon 'em," muttered his comrade George to Job Perrett. "That'll do. Summon 'em."

"Summon 'em?" shrieked Perrett. "Summon them—when they bring a mad dog in public? Look at 'im! 'E's ravin' mad! I've a duty to perform, and I'll do it!"

Little Ruff stood on the ledge above the form of Punch, showing his pretty pearl-like teeth and drawing his breath fast and furiously; all his gallant Scottish blood was on fire; for once he was wholly deaf to the voice of his friend. All the bondage of five cruel years was forgotten; he was once more Lady Helen's darling, defying all the bullies and all the cowards of the world.

"I've a duty to do, and I'll do it," cried Job Perrett. "Yah, yer little brute!—take that!"

And with all the force of a very strong man strung to the highest pitch by personal terror, he swung his truncheon above his head and

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brought it down with murderous weight on the little silvery head of Ruff.

Ruff dropped like a stone ; his skull was fractured.

A sullen roar of censure rose up from the indignant crowd.

"Which be the brute now?" cried the blacksmith.

"The poor dear little dog, he hadn't done naught!" cried an apple-woman.

The storm of hisses grew loud ; the constables left the show and faced the angry throng, nervously conscious that they had public opinion against them.

"Ye bully blackguards!" screamed Jane Todd. "Todd will be fit to kill me when he hears o't. Ye've spoilt my gains for the Lord knows how long. 'Tis Black Saturday with a vengeance. Afore we'll be able to train another Toby——"

She leaned out over the aperture, yelling and sobbing, thinking only of her lost receipts and of the difficulty of training a Toby.

In the noise, the confusion, the bawling, the sympathy of the crowd, the turbulence of her own outcries and lamentation, she never looked

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down at the little murdered dog, or saw that Ruffo, who had caught him as he fell, had rushed out of the show with the warm quivering body of his little friend clasped tightly to his chest.

Ruffo thought that he was only stunned. He ran with the fleetness of a hunted hare through two or three of the narrow old streets which twisted round about the market place, and never paused until he reached a farrier's shop in a dusky lane. The farrier had a few days before praised Ruff as a "rare thoro'bred un," and had said it was a cruel shame to see such a dog come down to a Punch's show. Ruffo rushed breathless into the shop, and found the good man there.

"Oh, sir, look at him, please!" he cried. "The wicked man has struck him—struck him on his head. Pray—pray do look at him; do save him!"

The farrier, startled, put on his spectacles, and bent down to look at the little dog in the boy's arms.

"Ay, ay! What a pity!" he said sadly. "My poor lad, he isn't hurt; he's dead!"

"Dead!"

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"Dead, sure enough. Look at that," said the farrier, gently touching the blood-stained, fractured little skull. "Who did it? 'Twas a brutal deed."

"Dead!" repeated Ruffo, stupidly.

He had not understood; he had known that Ruff was cruelly injured, but because the body was still warm and the eyes still open, he had not thought that it was death. He stood still, holding Ruff to him, the dark blood staining his shirt.

"Don't look like that, child," said the old man, earnestly. "The poor little dog's dead, sure enough; but 'twas no fault o' yours, I'm certain. Who did it?"

Ruffo did not answer, or even seem to hear; his gaze was strained and fixed, his small brown face ashen grey.

"Leave the body with me," said the old man, meaning to be kind. "I've a bit o' garden at the back. I'll bury him decent, under the elder tree. You can come and dig the hole, if you like."

Ruffo still did not seem to hear; he kept the head of Ruff pressed to him.

"The blood's a-spoiling your clothes," said

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the farrier. "What's the matter, child? Don't look like that. They'll give ye another dog. Come out into my bit o' garden."

He stretched his hand out to take the body of Ruff, meaning well; but Ruffo shrank from him in a spasm of terror.

"Do not touch him, or I will kill you!" he hissed through his white pointed teeth, as white and as pointed as were poor little Ruff's; his eyes were strained open to an abnormal size; his whole frame was convulsed. He rushed from the shop and was out of sight down the lane before the farrier had time to get to the doorway and call after him to come back, saying no harm had been meant.

Once across the threshold, Ruffo ran on and on, blindly and aimlessly, along the crooked lane, which was silent and empty, for its inhabitants were at the market square.

Nobody stopped him, or even gave a thought to him—a little, ill-clad, hungry-looking being—with his tangled curls blowing in the north-west wind. He held the body of Ruff close to his chest, and the poor little blood-stained head rested upon his right shoulder.

He ran on at first at a furious speed, then at

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a more halting trot, then at a laboured, breathless pace ; but he covered much ground, and had soon passed the limits of the small town and gained the outlying country.

He was dimly conscious that all was calm and cool around him ; that there were no more walls or houses ; that there were groves and hedges and tall trees in their stead, great wide green fields, and a slow, winding river.

But he continued to run onward, though his feet were sore and all his bones were aching.

Of physical pain he had no consciousness. All he was sensible of was that Ruff was dead—that he was all alone.

He ran on because he had only one instinct left : to get away from the brutal town, from the men and women, from the people who had killed Ruff, and who would take Ruff out of his arms and thrust him out of sight under the earth.

Some haymakers looked at him.

“What’s that queer-looking little chap about ?” said one.

Another answered :

“He’ve got a cur he’s a-goin’ to drown,” for from the distance of the meadow in which they

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were mowing, they could not see that the dog was dead.

"He looks rare queer," said the first man ; but they did not think any more about him.

He had no clear thought, no definite object. All he knew was that Ruff was dead, and that they wanted to take the body of his friend away from him. He ran on as a hunted creature does, on the mere mad instinct to escape. He had no idea where to go, or what he meant to do ; he only wanted to escape from every one and hide himself with Ruff.

His little dirty shabby figure toiled on along the roads, passing from sunshine to shade, and out of shade into sunshine, unmolested, until roads ceased, all cultivated land was far behind him, and wide moors covered with gorse stretched to the north, to the west, to the east. On the south was a plain, but a liquid plain : blue, silver, radiant, rippling, moving, heaving. It was only the estuary by Christchurch, but the tide was high, and the noon was bright, and the water, usually so dull and sad, sparkled in the unwonted light, and tumbled and played joyously, blown by the south-west wind.

Ruffo, standing amongst the sand of the

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mainland, saw the stir of waves for the first time since he had been brought to these English shores. He thought it was the blue sea of his memories, the southern sea of his lost home.

"Eccomi! Eccomi!" he cried, in the tongue of his childhood. He was here. Did the sea not know him?

The sea was safety, refuge, peace; the sea would take him home!

With the body of Ruff clasped to his breast, and the small blood-stained head lying on his shoulder, he ran down the slope of the downs to the beach below, and across the beach to the fringe of foam. The glad water leaped up and frolicked about his weary limbs, and kissed his bruised feet, and washed white the stunned brain of little Ruff.

"Eccomi! Eccomi!" he cried again, and with the dog's body locked in his arms he ran farther, and farther, and farther into the fresh cool waves.

The sea was merciful, and took them both.

In their death they were not divided.

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"YOU must not speak if you are spoken to, Palma," said her mother. "If they ask you questions you must say nothing in reply ; nothing, do you hear? Nothing. You must not say what is untrue, but neither must you tell the truth. Be silent, only silent, whatever they may say or do. Do you understand me, my beloved?"

"Of course I understand," said Palma.

She was a child of ten years old, strong and tall for her age ; lithe, agile, and flexible as a stem of the bamboos in their old garden. She was fair, with the warm, bright fairness of a Veronese angel ; her skin was like the snows of the Lombard Alps when the sunrise makes them flush ; her eyes were dark, wide-open, fearless, under level brows.

She answered her young mother briefly.

"I understand."

Her mother, Silvia Dolabella, looked at her

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wistfully. It was a frail bark to which to trust so much sacred treasure.

"Your father's life is in your hands," she murmured.

Palma nodded. There was a gleam of impatience in her eyes as of one who thought, "What need is there to say the same thing twice?" She was a child of few words.

"Darling, do not be so cold," murmured Silvia Dolabella. "You are so very young. To lay such a load upon you ; it breaks my heart."

Palma pushed her hair up off her brow.

"I am little," she said; "but I am strong. You should not doubt me, mother. He never does."

She meant her father.

"I do not doubt you, love," said her mother. "But you are a little *angiolino* in bronze ; you are hard, Palma. When I clasp you to my breast you are hard and cold, not as other children are. And you are not with me as you are with him ; you love him most, Palma."

The poor woman wept.

The child coloured. She did not deny the charge.

"It is different," she said, after a pause.

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"But I love you, mother, too. Only you want it said, and it teases me to say it. Things like that do not want talking of; they lie down, down, down, deep down—down ever so far."

"You are a strange creature; you are out of my reach," said her mother, with a sigh. "You have heard of too many grave things and heard too much strange talk for your years. You should be as the kids that frolic and lambs that frisk."

"And they are hung up on nails and bled to death," said Palma.

She had seen them hung up so, in dusky, cavernous places in the old streets of her native town, and the piteous bleating rang in her ears at night, and the scent of blood on the air was smelt by her in her dreams, and she had always refused to eat of Easter lamb or of Pentecost kid. Her mother had only laughed good-naturedly; but her father had said, in his pleasant serious tones:

"Little one, you do well."

That had been in the old happy days at Gallarate, days which seemed so very long ago to Palma, and to her mother also: the days

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before Lelio Dolabella's arrest, when they had all been living together in the old thirteenth-century house built in what was in ancient times called the Piazza of Pasquée. Dolabella was a young man : he had married early a pretty and not very wise young girl ; he was an advocate by calling, but all his heart and soul and mind were centred in the burdens of the people and the doctrines of the future. He was extremely beloved in Gallarate, and his slender form, his handsome face, his far-reaching, silvery voice, were well known all over the Lombard province. In an evil day for him the attention of those in authority was drawn to his public addresses. It was at the time when Francesco Crispi was imitating, in his brutal burlesque, the proscriptions of Sylla ; martial law was everywhere established, the prisons were full of young men who had no crime save to denounce conscription and desire liberty, and Dolabella was arrested with other of his fellow-citizens under the usual accusation of inciting to class-hatred and revolt against authority. For this his wife said to his child :

“ You must never speak ; neither the truth nor a lie.”

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"They may cut me in pieces, they will not make me say a word," thought the child, as others as valorous had vowed it before her on the old Italiote soil.

They had been so happy together in the old home, which was now ruined, like a bird's-nest shaken down in a storm. The house was still over their heads indeed—the dear old, dark, kind house, with gleams of gold on its cornices, and faded frescoed shapes upon its chamber walls, with its great arched nail-studded door, and its winding stone stair, and its nook of garden-ground between machicolated walls, green and damp with overgrowth of bay and laurel.

But he who had been its sunlight and its keystone, its keeper and master, was there no more, would never be there again. His step would fall no more on the old stones of the silent street; his smile would brighten no more the gloom of the vaulted stair. Never again would she sit in the recess of the grated window watching through the bars for his coming. Even though he escaped, even though he lived, there he would never come again. She knew that, and it was a knowledge too heavy for her years.

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She was only a young child, and she knew the "*maggior dolore*" of Dante.

"He has done no harm," she said to an old man, his friend and her godfather.

"He has loved men," said the old Garibaldian, bitterly. "There is no beast so ingrate to those who serve it, so base to betray, so quick to forget as the human beast."

"I know," said Palma, and it seemed to her as if she had lived hundreds of years, and was as old as the little church of San Pietro, hard by, which they said had been there before the advent of Christ.

She had been sitting with her father under the old cypress in the garden one sunny forenoon, when the guards had entered without warning or explanation, and had laid their hands on him, and had put their irons on his wrists, holding their revolvers to his temples.

"What is my crime?" he had said, with serenity; they had not replied, except with oaths, and two of them had pushed him out through the garden postern door, forcing the child aside, while others had rifled the house, and ransacked his desks and coffers, and sequestered his papers.

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“Be quiet, love ; I shall be back in an hour ; it is a mistake,” he had said ; and then the garden-door had been shut on him, and she had been left alone, while the armed men had broken open locks, and emptied cabinets, and piled letters and documents together and sealed them.

But he had not come back ; not in an hour, or in a day, or in a week, or in a month. He had been taken away to another town, in another province, to be judged by martial law, and they heard naught from him, only of him from rumour, and friends, and the Liberal press. Her mother had a little money, not much ; most of it had been sequestrated ; they lived on this ; the old grey house was their own. Her mother sold her beautiful pearls and the old silver plate and other things of value to send to pay for his defence by lawyers. But no defence by counsel was allowed to such prisoners as he, except such as might be made by some military man selected for that purpose by the court.

Neither Palma nor her mother had understood much ; they were like a doe and a fawn who see the stag, their sole protector, pulled down by hounds afar off, and strain their eyes and ears, and scream piteously, and are unheeded and unpitied.

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Their neighbours and friends did not, indeed, forsake them, but were timid in showing sympathy, for fear of being drawn into any trouble themselves. A great terror was on the country at that time, in the ninety-fourth year of this dying nineteenth century. All the Gallaratese knew that Lelio Dolabella was as innocent as a white wind-flower of any ill-doing ; but he was accused of treason, of conspiracy, of agitation, of setting class against class, of preaching subversive doctrine. They were afraid to show him and his any sympathy, lest they should draw down upon themselves suspicion and domiciliary visits and arbitrary arrest. Bad government is like a virus in the blood of the people ; it poisons the very marrow of their spine and makes the manliest a craven. When you cannot sit at a public table without a spy elbowing you, or walk a step without hearing the click of spurs and sabres behind you, or discuss the news in your daily journal in the street without the risk of a hand gripping your shoulder, you lose nerve, you cease to be yourself ; to use the expression of Georges Darian, you are not a coward, but you are a craven.

When her mother said in Palma's hearing

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that the sorrow and misery would not have come on them if only he would have minded his own welfare and occupied himself with his own affairs, and let the State bide in its own wickedness and the people look to their own grievances, Palma's eyes seemed to burn up her very soul ; those eyes said without words : " You are his wife, I am his child ; we belong to him ; cannot we, at least, be worthy of him ? "

Poor Silvia sighed and was mute. She did not dare to say, but she thought : What good had he done with his eloquence and his altruism ? Had not other young men gone into exile or prison through his influence ? Were not other women made desolate like her ? And what had his efforts changed ? Were not his proselytes scattered like sheep, those strayed who were not slaughtered ? What had he been able to alter ? What had he gained in return for their desolated hearths, their severed lives, their broken hearts ? She loved him dearly, but she felt bitterly against him for the wreck he had made of their happiness.

She was a young woman, rather helpless, a little pleasure-loving in a harmless, feminine way ; her husband had been torn from her, her

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home had been ruined, her money had been confiscated ; she saw herself, for no fault, shunned by her old acquaintances ; she was frightened, cowed, miserable ; it was not wonderful if she wished that her lot had been cast with those who heeded neither politics nor people, if it seemed to her that charity should lie first at home. But when she had said this thing she was afraid of the look which came on her child's face. Never had she seen on it so much scorn.

The little city of Gallarate is despoiled of most of that beauty which it possessed in the time of Visconti and Caracciolo, and the curse of modernity has fallen upon it, heavier and more destroying than the mailed hand of Frederic Barbarossa. But there are still to be found in it ancient nooks of peace, and nobly designed houses, like the house of the Dolabella, and beyond it there still stretches, in all its wild and natural freedom, the solitude of vast, unbroken moorlands, covered with what is called, in the dialect of the district, *el brug* : the heather. The fumes of gaseous vapours and the clouds of factory smoke may hang over the town, and bawling vendors and fussing clerks may throng the great colonnaded court of its Broletto, but

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neither stench nor uproar reaches the vast silences of the Brughiera, where the odour of musk and thyme and the hum of bees and the whirr of wings alone are smelt and heard.

Before her father's arrest, the very happiest hours of her always happy life had been passed on the Brughiera, especially on that great portion of it which lies between seven villages and is known by the name of Gradanasca, or Malpensa, for it is these moors which lie nearest of all to the gates of Gallarate.

Her father went there to read the works of the leaders of his school of thought, and to write his memoranda for those improvised lectures with which he stirred the souls and roused the spirits of the operatives of the town—weavers, spinners, glass-workers, button-makers, copper-smiths—who were moved by him as by no other because he, born a citizen of Gallarate, addressed them in that strange and resonant dialect which is unintelligible to all outside the limits of what was once the great *Castrum Seprium*.

Dolabella was a man of fine culture and academic training; but the local dialect was dear to him as to Gallaratese of all classes, with its sonorous vocables, its resonant consonants,

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and its picturesque images. One of the greatest crimes imputed to him was that he used the vernacular in his addresses to the populace, and opposed the use of anything else in the public schools ; and therefore he was idolized by the people and understood even by the rude husbandmen of the plain, who flock into the town with their raw silk, their hay, and their grapes, and to whom no single word of Italian, or even of Milanese, is comprehensible.

“It was these dialects which were spoken at Legnano, the Marathon of Lombardy,” Dolabella replied to his accusers. “*L’altera parola che il Cantò dirà.*”

But this reply was regarded by the military tribunal as a revolutionary insolence, and cost him dear.

Palma, although she could read and write Italian, never spoke anything except the dialect, and therefore the heath she loved so well, with its white bells and its honey odour, was to her as to the people, *el brug*. She always wore a little sprig of it in her belt or in her bosom ; while she was shut up in the town it spoke to her of the wide sea of blossom, of the fresh pungent smell, of the clear azure sky, of the hawk and

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kite sailing aloft, of the plover and the lark nesting in its shelter, of the hare nibbling at its shoots.

Her mother had never at any time gone to the moors ; she was one of the many women to whom all outside the streets seems barbarous and desolate. Now that Palma was alone she would not let the child go to them.

“Without your father you would be lost in those dreadful wild places,” she said obstinately.

Palma replied—

“In the blackest night I should find my way.”

“Who would show it you ? ”

“Who shows theirs to the shrew-mouse and the mole ? ”

She pined for the Brughiera. She was so used to its solitudes, its liberties, its vast horizons, its sweet, savage odours ; her father had seemed to her king of its wilderness. Her mother took her every morning and evening to pray, for their prisoner, in the little Church of San Pietro ; but it seemed to her that she could pray for him so much better and so much more hopefully if she could only get out to the open heaths. It was now the time when the heath was in blossom, all its little bells full of honey.

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Once she asked her old godfather to take her to the Gradanasca. But he said, "Your mother says no, dear. We must not add to her sorrows." So she was cooped up in the town, and the long, empty, mournful days slipped away and they had no news, and the police stalked in and out of the house whenever they chose, and seized the letters which came by post and peered into the cupboards and coffers.

"Then they wonder that mild men grow into murderous anarchists," whispered the old volunteer. "It was not for this that we fought with the Milanese in the Cinque Giornate, and that Garibaldi harangued us, the fifth regiment of his levies, from the balcony yonder in the Via Arnella."

The child knew by heart all the history of those times ; her grandfather and two of his sons had been killed in the 'Sixty-six, and no one knew the place where their graves were made.

Her great sorrowful eyes looked at the men of the Questura when they came about the house with such hatred and disdain that they menaced her with oath and gesture.

"'Twere best that this little mastiff bitch-pup should be strung up by the neck," said the

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brigadier ; but had they not as yet received permission to slaughter children, though, as the brigadier observed, if you killed a swarm of vipers, why not also the progeny of Socialists and anti-Monarchists ? The public weal should go, he said, before all.

One day they learned through the public press that Dolabella had escaped from the prison at Milan, in which he had been vainly awaiting his trial for many months, having been constantly called up for examination and remanded. It seemed to Palma as if the very Angel of the Annunciation had brought the tidings, coming into the house on a ray of heavenly light, as he was portrayed in the old pictures.

She was mute, but her face was so transfigured that the men of the Questura, who redoubled their vigilance around and about the house, said to one another—

“ The little beast knows where he is.”

But neither she nor her mother knew, and only at dead of night in their chamber did they dare to whisper to each other.

“ We shall hear from him ; maybe we shall see him ; he will dare anything to come to see us if he be living.”

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And Palma thought, "If he have really got free he has come to the Brughiera." Did not he and she know what an impenetrable shelter the heath afforded? Had they not explored old subterranean chambers, vaults of dismantled fortresses, caves of vanished peoples, lairs of animals, in the tufa and the sandy soil? Over that vast and unbroken level could not any one lying unseen under the heath, see the approach of a foe leagues away? Oh yes! if he were living, if he were really at liberty, it was to his own beloved Brughiera that he would surely come.

She knew one place of all others which she and he had explored together; a lower chamber or dungeon of some long-vanished *rocca* (castle) completely hidden by the heather growth, and tapestried by the moneywort and the ivy-leaved toad-flax. They had cleared it a little, and put seats of moss in it, and there had passed many of the hot hours of midsummer days, while the sun tried in vain to penetrate its cool green twilight. That was where he would come if he had indeed escaped. The improbability that he would be able to come so far without recapture did not occur to her. She was accustomed to think that he could work miracles.

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The persuasion that he was on the Brughiera grew so strong on her that she felt as intense an instinct to escape there as any poor wild bird taken among the heath and caged in Gallarate. When her mother one night, frightened, joyful, tremulous, awoke her from sleep, told her that he was indeed as near them as the Gradanasca, and would come disguised if he could to bid them farewell before he crossed the Alps, Palma was not surprised ; she had been so sure of it.

“Palma, listen, my love,” said her mother, breathlessly. “Idaliccio has been here ; he has brought me word that your father is on the Brughiera.”

The child’s whole face became radiant with light ; but she was not surprised ; she had felt so certain that he would come there, sooner or later.

Idaliccio was a peasant who occupied a farm belonging to them at Cardena, one of the seven hamlets which fringe the great moors. He was a rough old fellow, but of kind heart, and much attached to Dolabella, though he had always predicted that his master’s eloquence would land him in jail.

“But we must not let him come here, child,”

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said her mother. "Do not you understand? They are always watching the house. He will be taken like a bird in a net. Oh, my love!"

She threw her arms forward on the table, and, leaning her forehead on them, wept passionately.

The light died out of Palma's face. No, he must not come home. It was his home no longer; it was a sad, prison-like place, where men of the police came in and out at their pleasure, and whence joy had flown with privacy.

"Some one must tell him not to venture here," she said. "Will Idaliccio?"

"No," answered Silvia, her voice choked by weeping. "The old coward says he brought the message for sake of your father and of us; but he is so scared with fear at what he has done, that he has gone away to his brother, the fisherman on the Olmo. Your father nearly killed him with terror, starting up before him in the gloaming."

"And my father said?"

"Only this: 'Go tell my wife and child I am in hiding here; I will come into Gallarate

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to-morrow night at all costs to see them, for I must put the Alps between me and them.' ”

“ Put the Alps between us ? ”

“ Ay, it is his only chance of life, dear. Staying here, he will be caught sooner or later, and cast back in prison.”

“ I see.” Palma's face grew very grave with the premature age of a great suffering.

The water dripped in the garden, the clock ticked, the sounds which are heard in all old houses in the stillness of night seemed to creep on the silence like living things. Palma sat up in her bed with her eyes wide open, full of pain.

“ Let me go,” she said at last.

“ You—to the Brughiera ? ”

The poor young mother wept convulsively again, and cried to the Madonna to help her, for her burden was greater than she could bear.

“ Hush, mother ; people in the street may hear you,” said the child. “ Yes, I will go. I know the Gradanasca as you know your chair at church. He is hid in our old dungeon there—that we may be sure.”

At last she wrung a reluctant, agonized

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consent from her mother ; but Silvia Dolabella thought her cold and strange, and said to her—

“ You are like a little statue of bronze ; you bruise my breast.”

All that night neither the child nor she could sleep ; they thought he might arrive, that they might hear some tap at the shutter, some step on the flags ; they only heard the sound of the water dripping from the pipe in the garden wall, the chirp of crickets in the artichokes, the tolling of the hours from city clocks.

Palma's eyes were wide open and sleepless ; she saw her mother's red tear-laden lids with impatience. She was very pale, but her face was resolute.

At four of the clock she was ready to go upon her quest. She wore a homespun smock-shaped linen frock ; she had but to put on an apron of many colours and a large yellow kerchief over her head to look like a peasant's child ; she put on wooden shoes, and took with her a flask of wine and a roll of bread. She withdrew herself a little impatiently from her mother's embraces, and with her cheeks wet from her mother's tears, not her own, she went

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out of the garden doorway, which opened on a paven lane.

She was as happy as a prisoned dove let loose, as bold as had been those three doves which had alighted and sat on the Italian Carroccio throughout the carnage of Legnano, striking terror with their white wings into the soul of Barbarossa's self. She was going to find her father, and she was going to see the heather in blossom.

It was now the dark which precedes the dawn.

There was no one in the lane, or in the piazza beyond it. Unquestioned and uninterrupted, she got outside the nearest barrier of the town and took the road she knew so well, which lead to the Gradanasca. She met a cart or a waggon now and then, oxen-drawn, loaded with fruit or hay or cans of milk, or the brooms made on the moors of the Brughiera. But no one noticed her—a little girl with a yellow kerchief over her head and shoulders. The dawn had come when she had passed out into the open country. The sunrise lighted the range of the Lombard Alps when she saw the first plant of heather. She knelt down by it,

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and crossed herself, and said a pater. Then she kissed it, the beloved *brug* which she had not seen so long.

Soon, as far as her eyes could reach, she saw nothing but the *brug*, a vast expanse of rose and green and white and purpling crimson under the changes of light and shadow ; wide as the sea and as mutable in colour, bounded only by the distant snow-lines of the lower Apennines. Its pungent, sweet odour came to her on the breeze ; the familiar buzz of innumerable bees filled the silence ; high above sailed great white clouds, a hawk hung poised against the blue.

The child's heart heaved : the tears which had not fallen for her mother's woe ran down her cheeks in this intense rapture. She stood waist-high in the branching heather, and kissed it again and again. Then she gathered her courage up in her hands, as they say here, and sought for the little track which led to the vault of the *rocca*. She went cautiously, hiding herself under the thickly growing plants, as the hare did, and the quail, the partridge and the polecat, the fern-owl and the windover, and all other hunted and harassed creatures.

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There was not a soul in sight ; it was not the season for cutting and carting the heather, or for shooting ; the sole living thing she was the least likely to see would be some old man or woman looking for mushrooms. As far as the sight could range there was nothing but heather : acres on acres of heather, lying in the glow of earliest summer. She had never been there unaccompanied before ; her father had always been with her, and to him the Brughiera had been familiar from earliest boyhood. Palma had nothing now to guide her but memory, and the moors were almost as level and as trackless as a desert of Africa. Childlike, she had never realized until she reached them the great difficulty of her task. She had never even noticed whether the ruin of the *rocca* was to north, south, east, or west. She had always run in her father's footsteps, taking no heed herself. But in the far distance she saw an old grey round tower ; she remembered that he had told her that tower had once been a pigeon-cote, a *colambarium*, and was still the nesting-place of wild birds. She remembered also that this tower had been upon their left when they had approached the site of the *rocca*, but always very,

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very far away, looking black among the rosy and purpled stretches of the moors. So she went to the right, and in the contrary direction from the pigeon-cote. She conquered her weakness, and pressed on through the shrubs which reluctantly yielded her a passage. But a sense of the immense difficulty of her task came over her.

If she had only a dog to aid her ! But their dog, a spaniel, who had been four years older than herself, had died in the very month of her father's arrest. If he had only been with her—poor, clever, good Morino—he would have remembered better than she could. For the vastness, the silence, the splendour of colour, the immense tracks of flowering land stretching away on every side, began to fill her with a sense of awe, and to bewilder her.

The *rocca* had been on the right of the dove-cote, and almost in a straight line with it, but far away ; that was all she knew, all she had for guidance.

She walked on and on till the sinews of her legs ached and her step became less sure. The shrubs were in many places stiff and stubborn ; her hands were torn in parting them to make

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a passage. The vertical sun beat through the kerchief on to her thick, curling hair and began to make her head ache. Sitting up in her little white bed, it had seemed so easy to find her father on the Brughiera; but the reality of the search was hard. The reality which she did not even yet herself realize was that she was lost upon these moors. She rested a little while upon the ground, and broke off a corner of the loaf and ate it. The wine she did not touch; it was for him. There was a runlet of water near her, almost dry but clear. She drank from it, making a cup of her hands. The bees were buzzing all around her, above the blossoms of the *brug*. It was a pleasant, mirthful, cheerful sound, and banished her fears. The air was absolutely still except for those humming sounds. The sky and the plain looked immense. The towers and roofs of the town had long before sunk below the horizon. To the north there was always the snow-line of the Alps.

She recalled a story her mother had told her, to cure her passion for the moors, a true and tragic tale of a child of six, a little boy, who had been lost on Gradanasca, and who had been found dead after three days' useless search, and

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whose footmarks had shown that he had wandered round and round like an ass in a mill till he had fallen down and perished.

But she was sustained by the courage of a great devotion, and she said to herself, "He has no one else to save him, only his little girl." And she threw back her head-covering, for the sun began to mount in the heavens, and scanned the wide expanse of blossoming heather, whose colours melted in the distance into the softest hues of opal and of amethyst.

A leveret scampered past her feet, a kestrel sailed across the blue, a black-cap sang; his voice near, himself unseen; she felt a sob rise in her throat, and her eyes grew dim. Where was he?

Under the ground at her feet? Beneath the purple cloud of the blossoms? Far away or near? Where was the buried *rocca*? Would no mole tell her who knew the underground way? No falcon who flew above so high and must know everything?

She saw an owl asleep, leaning as is the habit of his family, against the stem of a heather plant grey as himself. She stretched out her hand to stroke him.

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"Where is the road, dear owl? You must know—you who can see when all is dark!"

But the owl, annoyed and bewildered by being awakened in broad day, said nothing, and hobbled out of sight drowsily, and went to continue his slumbers under other plants of heather. There was nothing to tell where the place which she sought for was. She had now left the *colambarium* out of sight on the eastern moors, and she walked on aimlessly, stumbling often over the thick, entangled roots of the heaths; once she stumbled over a dust-adder which looked like a root; it hissed, but did no more. The sense stole on her that she might walk thus for hours, days, weeks, and be no nearer to her goal.

And, unless she found him, he might go down into Gallarate that very night, and fall into the hands of the police.

Cold dews of anguish stood on her fair, warm face; she could have screamed aloud, but she set her teeth and kept in her cries; child as she was, she knew that if she lost her self-control she would lose her senses.

She could tell by the position of the sun that it was now afternoon. She had been wandering

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thus many hours ; her poor mother at home, weeping and praying, counting the moments on the clock !

“ Oh, I have not been good to her ! I have not been good ! I have thought only of him ! ” she said to her own heart in repentance ; and she thought of her little bed, of the blessed palm hung above it, of the old green garden between the stone walls, of the grey cat, of the evening meal, of the big cento-foglio roses in the old blue Savona vase—of all the familiar things which she might never see again.

“ But if I can only save him ! ” she thought ; if she could only save him, they might carry her home dead.

The thought that he might go home that very night if no one warned him was to her like a knife being turned in an open wound. She had been so foolish to be sure that she should know her way on the Gradanasca ! Yet, again, who was there to come if she had not ? Idaliccio could have done, of course ; but Idaliccio, in terror and selfishness, had gone to the Olmo river, forsaking his master in trial.

It was now three o'clock on the midsummer afternoon. She could not tell the hour precisely,

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but she guessed it; she had been ten hours away from home. The sense of solitude and helplessness began to weigh on her like a leaden hand, pressing her down into the earth. She was very tired; she dropped down like a lame lamb, and fell asleep amongst the heather, too fatigued to have either fear or reflection, or even anxiety, conscious in her. She slept soundly, dreamlessly, on the warm sand, the close-woven stems of the plants shielding her from the sun. She had put off her heavy, hard shoes, and her little stuff jacket; the dull white of her homespun frock made a point as of light amongst the shadows of the blossomed *brug*. It caught the keen eyes of a mounted guard riding afar off, pushing his horse with difficulty through the heather growth. He with two others had come out from the barracks at the Cascinale on the search for Lelio Dolabella.

He rode up to where the child was lying asleep, her cheek upon the sand, her small feet in the sun. He saw the flask of wine. He thought, "She has been sent to carry food, and a message." He got off his horse and stood beside her; he was a man of Gallarate; he recognized the fugitive's little

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daughter. He stooped and grasped her shoulder.

"Get up, *bimba mia*."

Violently awakened from her deep, dreamless, merciful sleep, Palma had for the moment no sense of where she was or of who spoke to her. The sun dazzled her eyes; the buzzing of the bees was in her ears. The guard pulled her up on her feet with little courtesy.

"You are that outlaw's child," he said, and shook her roughly. "You are going to him."

Then she understood. She remembered at the same time as consciousness returned to her that she must say nothing.

"Speak!" said the man, getting angry; and he struck the pommel of his sword with his clenched fist. She did not speak.

The guard put his hands trumpetwise to his mouth and shouted to his comrades, who were some distance off, their horses' heads and their own accoutrements showing above the heather. They came at as quick a pace as they could through the network of shrubs.

"Look here," he said to them; "this is the daughter of Dolabella. Of course, she knows

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where he is hid. But the little mumchance will not speak."

He shook her again.

"Where is your father, little one?" said one of the new-comers. "Only say that and we will let you go. We know he is on the Brughiera. 'Tis no use your being obstinate."

She might have been of wood or stone for any sign she gave of hearing them.

"I have a mind to blow your brains out, you little wretch!" said the first-comer; and he picked up the flask, smelt it, tasted it, then took a long draught and passed the rest to his comrades.

The horses were pawing, snorting, shivering under the torment of the flies; the sun was at its hottest; the men had been out some hours and were ill-disposed to waste their time there on a little rebel who was dumb as a Gesu carved in stone.

"Come with us to those who will make you confess," said the first-comer, as he took a stout bit of cord out of his breeches-pocket and bound her right wrist to his stirrup.

But the milder man interposed: he had children of his own.

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"If you drag her through the heather you will kill her," he said ; "she is but a small female thing."

"She is big enough to speak," said her captor, with an oath.

But Palma did not speak.

"Look here," said the other one to her, "show us where your father is, my dear, and I will take you to the town before me on my saddle. Nobody shall hurt you. You will have a nice ride, and be home by sunset."

She might have told them that she did not know where her father was, but they would not have believed her, and it was best and simplest to say nothing at all. That was the only idea which stood out clear in the confusion and the terror of her mind ; she must not say a word. Whatever she might say they would turn in some way against him.

The three armed men and the three fretting horses were towering above her ; they looked colossal in the blazing light ; the rosy and purple haze of the heather looked like a sea of flame. Where was her father ? At any moment he might be seen and taken. The thought of his peril numbed her to her own.

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"Swing her up on your saddle if you do not like me to make her run tied to mine," said the man who had found her to the one who had thought it would be cruel to tie her to the stirrup-leather. The guard thus addressed bent down and swung her by her right arm and the belt of her frock up on to the saddle in front of him.

"Hold on by the horse's mane if you do not wish to roll off," he said to her, and the three riders began their slow trot across the moor in the direction of what was once a large dairy-farm in the last century, and is still called the Cascinale, though it is now changed into the barracks of a battalion of infantry, the only pile of buildings which breaks the solitude of the Gradanasca.

It is difficult work, riding through the heather, which in many places is as high as a horse's girth, and to move quickly is impossible; if they had gone fast she would have fallen, giddy as she was from fear, from fasting, from grief, and from the unusual motion.

Jeering and joking at their comrade for his load, the other men pushed their way through the tangle, and he who was burdened by her followed, keeping hold with his right hand on the child's skirts, lest she should at all risks

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slide to the ground and run away. The sound of the horses' hoofs muffled on the turf alternated with the other sound of the bending and breaking of the plants, the whirr of wings as birds flew up affrighted, the jingle of the chains, the bits, the scabbards.

For a while she lost consciousness ; the sun beat on the back of her neck, a deadly terror, a sickly heat, a burning thirst consumed her, and ended in insensibility.

The horses paced on and on, now trotting where they could, now pushing their flanks through the heather. It was two hours from the time they had discovered her when they at last drew rein before the outhouses and outposts of what had been the old dairy-farm. The men were hot, jaded, hungry, ill-disposed. The one who carried her on his saddle swung her roughly to the ground, shaking consciousness into her by the shock of her body on the stones. The others dashed some water on her face from a tank in the courtyard. The one who had been the first to find her stooped and tied her wrists behind her back, then gave her a kick.

"Get up, you spawn of rebellion," said he.

There were many soldiers in the yard ; they

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looked on with indifference. He left her lying on the stones, and went indoors to make his report of the day's work.

She was but half-conscious still ; her limbs were sore and aching from the long jolting ride ; she lay on her side, her hands tied behind her ; the soldiers came and stared, and made their jokes ; she was wet from the water thrown over her ; mosquitoes swarmed on her face ; her linen frock was stained with all the colours of the moors, and heavy with gathered sand.

They left her lying there on the pavement of the court like a bundle of hay or a faggot of brambles ; there was no fear that she could set herself free.

After a time her captor came, and took hold of her, and pulled her up on to her feet. Then he drove her before him to the interior of the building, to a small bare room, into the presence of his superiors. She reeled and tottered, and with difficulty kept herself from falling. Every limb seemed broken and every nerve seemed bleeding.

"She is a little child," said the commandant of the Carabineers in surprise ; and he asked her gently, "You are the daughter of Lelio Dola-bella ?"

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Palma was silent.

"Why do you not reply?"

She was mute.

"Why were you on the Brughiera?"

She gave no answer.

"You know where your father is?"

She said nothing.

"We will compel you to speak," said the officer, losing his temper, though he still felt surprise and compassion. She was so small, so bruised and broken, so miserable-looking, like any little leveret bathed in its mother's blood. He saw that she could scarcely stand, and bade her sit down. She dropped upon the stone bench near her. She looked no more than a heap of wet, sand-stained leaves.

"If you remain thus obdurate you will force me to punish you," he said to her; and he tried with every question, argument, threat, and persuasion to make her speak, but in vain.

"She will die or go mad," he thought, "but she will not speak."

Her first captor, standing erect beside her, smiled in triumph. He had told his captain that the little wretch would not speak.

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“Take her away,” said his superior at last, out of patience. “Put her in a cell. Let a woman search her ; she may carry some missive, some plan of conspiracy. Then untie her and leave her alone. Hunger and darkness will unlock her lips.”

His orders were carried out to the letter. A woman stripped her, finding nothing on her ; her clothes were bundled on again hurriedly ; her arms were untied, but she was left to sit or lie on the damp brick pavement as best she could. Then the door was shut and barred on the outside. Within was an impenetrable darkness. She was not afraid of the dark. She was used to sleep without a light. But darkness in this dread stone place was not a soft and friendly thing, like the dark in her own dear little room at home, where the stoup of holy water hung close to her bed and her parents slept in the next chamber.

Shriek after shriek rose to her lips, but she repressed them by putting her fingers in her mouth and holding her tongue to keep it mute. From her cries they would have learnt nothing, but she felt that they would dishonour her father and encourage his enemies.

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The hours passed on ; no sound reached her, for the cell was in an isolated part of the building, adjoining the cattle-stables ; no one remembered her. She was worse than nothing in the eyes of her captors—less in their sight than a newt or a locust. The child of a rebel, of an Anarchist, what matter if she lost her reason or died of terror in that underground room ? Such seed of the devil was best spilt, and stamped on, and destroyed. The commandant, who had been more interested in her resistance, was playing cards and had forgotten her. The child of a revolutionist, what mattered if such trash as that died of fright, were stung by scorpions, or were eaten by rats ? She had deserved any fate by her contumelious obstinacy.

She lay on the stones, her arms outstretched and her head resting on them. She tried not to think of all the horrible, unknown things which might have been creeping and crawling near her ; after all, her father would have said they were "the little children of Nature" as much as she was so. But it is difficult for the mind of a man to resist the impression of terror made by total darkness and by captivity in an unfamiliar place. For a little girl it was impossible. She felt that

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her brain was going, that she would soon be dead or worse than dead.

A key groaned in the rusty lock, a flood of light flashed over her. It was the woman, who returned to tempt her.

"Only tell what you know," she said again, "and you shall have such a feast—water and wine too, as much as you like; and with the morning be back at your mother's house. Why be such a little wicked fool? You are bound to obey authority. We all are."

The woman sent to her had been ordered to spare no effort to terrify or to persuade her, but she had succeeded in neither. The child remained dumb. She was in pain all over her body, bruised and sore and stiff; her mind was dulled, her throat was parched: but she did not forget that she had one supreme duty to fulfil—the duty of silence.

"You are very little to be so mulish," said the woman. "You should be soundly flogged."

Palma scarcely heard the words. Her ears were full of booming sounds like the buzzing of the bees in the heather multiplied a thousand-fold.

The woman, irate, snatched up the lamp and

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went out with it, locking the door again on the outside. Once more the impenetrable darkness descended.

Hunger and thirst tormented her ; never before in her life had she ever wanted for anything or had an appetite unsatisfied ; she was now sick for want of food, fevered by want of water, racked by pain of every kind.

The woman entered more than once, bringing bread, soup, and fruit, and a flask of water. She put them before Palma, but out of her reach.

“ You shall have all these if you will only speak.”

Palma shut her eyes not to see them, and made a motion of refusal with her head.

The woman left her for an hour, and then returned, with the tray in her hand.

“ You will speak now, eh ? ”

Palma shook her head.

The wolf of hunger and the shark of thirst were together tearing at her entrails ; but she would not yield.

“ It is impious to defy authority,” said the woman, who was a brigadier’s wife. “ Your father is a bad man, setting class against class, and defying the law.”

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Palma's eyes blazed with wrath as they looked upward ; but she did not answer in words.

"Come," said her temptress, "thirsty you must be." She poured out from a flask she carried some bright cold water into a glass.

All the child's frame thrilled and writhed in longing for the draught ; but she covered her eyes with her hands not to see it.

"You little beast !" cried the woman, savagely. "You should be thrown down the well and drink your fill there once and for ever. I shall go and say so to the commandant. The well in the court has no bottom. It goes to the centre of the earth, they say."

A shudder ran through the child from head to foot, but she did not speak.

"Come," said the brigadier's wife in wheedling tones, "'tis so little to do. Just say where your father is, and you shall come and eat of the best, and sleep in my daughter's bed, and at morning away to your mother, who will say you have done well. For, poor soul ! she must lose her husband ; she need keep her child."

The argument was subtle and penetrating ; but Palma was proof against its sophism. She made

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no answer. "Poor, poor mother!" she thought; but she did not open her lips.

The woman tried all persuasions she could think of; then, furious at her failure, for success would have brought credit and reward, she dashed the flask of water down on Palma's body, and with zest saw it shiver into atoms and the good spring water flow away useless over the child's clothes and the stones of the floor.

Palma did not speak.

"Stay where you are, you dumb toad!" the brigadier's wife cried with violence. "At dawn the scorpions will come out of their holes and find you."

Then she went out, slamming the door behind her, the key again grating in the rusty lock. The child, sick with terror, turned on her side and lapped the spilt water on the ground; it was but little she could get thus and rather tortured than assuaged her burning thirst; the pieces of broken glass, too, cut her lips. She dragged herself up painfully upon her knees, and then up on to her feet; there was a little blessed gleam of light; it was a moon-ray shining through the narrow slit of the unglazed window. From the

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open air there came to her the sweet wild smell of the blossoming *brug*. The familiar light and the friendly scent restored her fainting senses, steadied her dizzy brain ; she thought, with a gleam of hope, could she get out by that loophole ?

It was no more than a loophole, very narrow and at least two meters above her head.

From her captors she knew she could expect no pity ; such prisoners as she are protected neither by youth nor old age.

All that the police does is well done, and deaths in the cells are never inquired into ; a complaisant surgeon is always ready to write the cause down under the name of some natural disease or stroke of fate.

Palma had heard much of these things from listening to the conversation of the young men who came to her father's house. Young as she was, she knew she would have no mercy from her jailers, illegal though her detention might be. The window looked very narrow, but then she was very slight of form, and her linen frock, wet through, clung close to her.

There was nothing in the cell by which she could scale the wall ; it was entirely bare ; but

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in the wall itself there were projections and irregularities, made by stones jutting out beyond others, and in one place an iron stanchion. She had been taught agility in climbing by her father, but she was now so feeble from exhaustion and fatigue and hunger, so feverish from fear and misery and ill-treatment, that she had scarcely the power to drag herself up to the wall. She could not tell, either, what there might be upon the other side ; by the smell of the heather, she thought it opened on the moors, but she could not be certain.

She knew, however, that where she was she had no mercy to hope for, that the scorpions would feel pity sooner than her jailers, and that knowledge spurred her to superhuman effort. She grasped the first projecting stone with her toes, and set her nails to clutch another higher up ; she lifted herself high enough to grasp the iron stanchion, and, clinging to that, pulled herself still higher and higher upward, with the movement of a woodpecker climbing a tree.

The smell of the heaths came into her nostrils, the moon-ray fell across her face ; they gave her courage. She managed, slipping and bruising her feet and hands, to reach the window and

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look out ; all she saw was the wide expanse of the Brughiera lying peacefully in the light of the moon. But the opening was so narrow that she feared she could never force herself through it ; and if she fell head downward ? Well, even that, she thought, were better than to stay here to be starved, or beaten to death, or perish of thirst. At least, thus she would die quickly and disappoint her father's pursuers.

She put her head through the aperture, then she drew her shoulders together, making them as narrow as she could ; then she forced herself through the opening, bruising and tearing the skin of her arms. She could by no possibility turn so as to descend feet foremost ; she could only push herself through, and go down head foremost to whatever might wait for her below. And this she did. When her knees were on a level with the coping of the window, she thrust herself through the aperture ; her own weight overbalanced her, and she fell, thus, as a man falls who tries to fly. By good fortune there was a pile of dried heather underneath the wall ; it was elastic and yielded under her. She was stunned for a few moments, but was not otherwise hurt except for scratches and bruises on her

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bare limbs. She was able to look about her, and realized that there was no barrier between her and the open country.

The high walls of the barracks loomed behind and above her, but facing her there was the open moorland. She heard some dogs bark on the other side of the building ; hurt and half senseless as she was, she gathered herself up and stumbled across the stretch of turf which parted her from the open moor. She drew in new strength from the knowledge of her freedom and the smell of the dear wild *brug* ; she ran on and on, like a poor little broken-kneed pony, falling often, but getting up again and going onward, bruising and dashing herself against the heather, but having no sense except of recovered liberty.

The stars grew larger, the moon grew higher ; perhaps hours had passed, she did not know. Suddenly her limbs gave way under her, and she dropped, powerless to do more, struck down by utter exhaustion, like a bird felled by a stone. But she fell among the heather, and it closed over her and hid her from sight, so that when the armed men rode out over the moorland in pursuit of their lost prey they passed within a

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few yards and never saw her, but saw only the moonlit blossoms of the flowering heaths.

The heather sheltered her as if it returned the affection which she had conceived for it, and the timid creatures of the night which hid among it stirred around her and did her no harm. The toad drank the night dews, the little brown owl hunted the moth, the water-beetle boomed through the dark. The child remained motionless and senseless, in a stupor which resembled death.

When the first faint grey of the dawn came on the eastern edge of the moors, an old man with a mule, the animal carrying large panniers, came across the heather by a narrow track which he knew. It was the old peasant of Cardano, Idaliccio. He had repented him of his cowardice and desertion, and when on his way to the Olmo water had turned back and taken his mule out of its stall, and gone on to the Brughiera at evening, and at nightfall had made his way to the place where Lelio Dolabella was in hiding, which was not the *rocca*, and warned him not to enter Gallarate, but to get across the Lombard plains, and escape with all speed across the Splügen into Switzerland. Now, after speeding

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his master on his northward way, he was returning to his own homestead at Cardano, his mule's panniers filled with white sand as reason for his presence on the moorland, were any wanted.

He had heard nothing of Palma's wandering, but, as they passed the place where she lay, his mule dropped its head towards the ground and stopped and whinnied ; it knew her well, for she had often given it bits of bread and carrots when she had come to the peasant's dwelling on the edge of the moor, or when the old man had brought his beast into the town. Idaliccio, who was well aware that his mule was wiser than he, looked to see what was under the heather, and recognized the child.

He guessed at once why she had come there. She looked to him as if she were dead, but he put his old horny hand to her lips and felt her breath warm upon it, though the pulse of her heart was too faint to be heard.

He stood still a few moments in doubt, then shovelled the sand out of his panniers, cut some heather with a billhook which always hung at his waistband, laid the plants across the mule's back from pannier to pannier, and raising the

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child in his arms, placed her gently on them as on her bed. Then, with a piece of rope which was in one of the panniers, he bound her safely to the mule's back amid the heaths.

"She was always so fond of the *brug*," he thought. "Poor little soul! she came after her father and got lost, no doubt; and it was all my fault because I said I should go to the Olmo river."

Then he turned his back on his village, and took his way slowly across the moor, knowing nothing of the search which the mounted guards had made for her. Going as he did, perforce, at a foot-pace, walking beside her lest she should slip downward, it was noon before he reached the gates of Gallarate; he had covered her with heather to keep off the sun-rays and the flies.

"'Tis my grandchild as I am taking in to hospital; she had a bad fall on Gradanasca, and is stupid from it; she has hurt her head," he said to the men at the toll-house, and moved the bundles of heath that they might see the human burden he carried.

They looked, and let him pass, after thrusting their hands into the panniers to make sure that they were empty.

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And so he took her in safety home to the old grey, kindly house in the Piazza of Pasquée.

When she regained consciousness, which was not until many days later, she was lying in her own little bed under the bleached palm.

"I never spoke!" she cried aloud. "Tell him I never spoke!"

Silvia Dolabella kissed her small bruised feet.

TOTO

TOTO

THEY had a small shop, a very small one, in a narrow passage which debouched from the Rue des Francs-Bourgeois, and passed behind the tower of the Hôtel Barbette. It is a sorry time for *le petit commerce* in Paris, as in all other cities; the great establishments destroy the humble little traders. It is difficult to live on *le petit commerce* in any town, still more difficult to do so in great capitals. But they managed to pay their way; they had their customers, faithful if few; they spent little on themselves, and they were able to put something by for a rainy day. They had been in this same shop ever since their marriage, forty years before—a bit of old Lutetia, possibly unaltered from the day when Louis d'Orléans rode out to his death from the Barbette.

It was a shop and a dwelling-house in one, with a high roof and deep eaves and mullioned windows. When the door opened there were

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two steps which led down into the shop ; and above the door was one of the old painted and gilded signs, the Pot aux Roses, which creaked when the wind was high, and pleased the sparrows as a perch. At the Pot aux Roses they sold wooden toys and tapes, and threads and linens, and the like. Nanon usually looked to the one and Charlot to the other. They were Nanon and Charlot to the whole neighbourhood. No one except the tax-collectors and the postmen ever called them Monsieur and Madame Dulac. They were merry little people, short of stature, vivacious, bright-eyed, quite contented with their lot, very fond of each other, and although thrifty, very charitable. They had both been born in this Quarter of the Temple, and seldom went out of their faubourg except on summer Sundays to one of the woods or villages near.

They had seen many changes since they had first come there on their wedding-day, when the Pot aux Roses had been fresh painted and gilded, and the Prince President had been at the Elysée. But the storms had passed and burst over Paris without touching them ; they hid themselves like two birds during rain, and

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when each tempest was past, came out to chirp and twitter again. They had the old gay elastic temper of France, which is vanishing from the race under the influence of German beer, and militarism, and machines, and absinthe, and science. They had had their sorrows, sharp and sad ; they had lost two children in early infancy, and a nephew whom they had loved dearly had been shot in the Siege of Paris ; but all that was now far away, and they were happy in a simple, pleasant, kindly way, which showed itself in doing all they could for those less fortunate.

“ For fortunate we are ; *faut le dire, hein ?* ” said Charlot, very frequently ; and, though he knew it not, they were most fortunate of all in their contented dispositions and their mutual affection. There are many such cheerful bourgeois interiors in Paris, but not one was more cheerful than theirs. They had good health, good appetites, good tempers, good neighbours ; and if many would have thought it a hard life to serve in a little dark shop all day, and spend the evenings counting up sous and centimes, they did not think so. They were used to it, and they gained enough by it to keep

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themselves and to afford one luxury, Toto—Toto, who ate as much as two dragoons, and for whom they were obliged to pay the tax regularly to have civic permission for him to live.

One cold, wet, windy autumn night, boys had been stoning Toto in the Rue Vieille du Temple. Toto, being then a shapeless mass of wool, got out by himself—no one knew how—from some stable-yard or travelling circus. Charlot, who had been to the greengrocer's and poulterer's to buy his Sunday dinner, was going home in that windy night. He drove the boys off, and, after some hesitation, invited the frightened, friendless bundle of wool to waddle after him in the gaslight. There was scarcely any one about; the night was chilly and wet. He reached home with his foundling in safety, having been obliged to take it up in his arms for the last few yards, because it was so tired.

"It is very dirty," said Nanon, when he and the pup reached the Pot aux Roses.

"It is very wet," said Charlot.

"It will be a great trouble," said Nanon.

"I will take the trouble."

"There will be the tax to pay," persisted Nanon.

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"I will go without my *piquette*."

"He will destroy everything."

"We will keep him in the yard."

"There is no shape nor make in him."

"That is because he is young."

"He must be kept in the yard."

"Yes, yes ; in the yard—yes," replied Charlot, who was practised in the art of giving an inch to get an ell. The yard had once been a portion of an old palace court ; it was spacious, flagged, and contained, beside its well, a large fig tree.

The puppy whimpered. Nanon ran into the kitchen for some bread and milk.

"Now he has eaten with us he must stay. The very savages would say that," said Charlot. And the waif was put for that night in the wood-cellar. It was raining too heavily to turn him out into the yard.

That was now seven years ago, and the stray was still at the Pot aux Roses. With time he had shown himself to be a magnificent Newfoundland dog, black except for one white spot on his chest and one white glove ; a very monarch and god amongst dogs, grave as Buddha, powerful as Zeus, kind as Krishna.

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When his nose was out of the shop-doorway his tail was in the little room behind. He was a Colossus in a nutshell ; but he was as happy as his owners, and he was the idol of the neighbourhood. There was always eager competition for the honour of taking Toto for his daily swim in the Seine.

Charlot was a good walker, and the apothecary had told him to walk to keep down his tendency to *embonpoint*, and often in the very early mornings or the late evenings he left the shop to his wife and took Toto to Bercy, or to Charenton, along the quays, or over one of the bridges, and even sometimes to Vincennes and St. Mandé on Sundays ; to Nogent, where Toto could plunge in the Marne as much as he pleased ; to the Lac Dumesnil, where he was sure to get sugar and biscuits and cutlets from the merry-makers at the *café* of the two little isles ; or to Joinville-le-Pont, where he was welcomed as a comrade by the oarsmen and swimmers who assembled there.

He and Charlot became an attraction to the *canotiers* at that double bend where Marne and Seine embrace, and Toto used to swim now with one canoe, now with another, and dive, and go

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after sticks, and steer himself with his great tail. Sunday would not have been Sunday on the water without him to a great many frequenters of the river. No doubt in that little house, in that city life, Toto had not all the freedom he deserved. No doubt he would have liked to see the meadows and the woods oftener than now and then on a *fête* day; no doubt his fine instincts and his vast strength were cribbed, cabined, and confined. But he had always about him that affection which to the dog, as to the child, makes up for so much else that may be lacking in his home. They both loved him, Charlot the more ardently of the two, and they were very proud of him : he was so big, and so beautiful ; and he had saved the lives of people—once at Charenton, when a wherry had been upset by a river steamer; and once one bitter black night when in the ice-cold muddy water by the Pont d'Austerlitz a woman had been drowning.

A little paragraph had been put in the *Gaulois* about this latter good action, and Charlot cut it out and framed it under a photograph of the hero. It hung in the shop, and every one saw it and read it, and to those who

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might otherwise have missed it, Charlot said, as he served them over the counter—

“It is in print what Toto did—yes—over there ; you can read it ; I cut it out of the *Gaulois*. I was with him, such a night as it was ! Ink-black, with broken ice in the Seine, and he in the water—pong ! pouf ! as if it were summer, without waiting a moment, once he had seen that poor drowning creature struggling. The light from the bridge was on her.”

Many new customers, as well as old ones, came to the Pot aux Roses to see the dog who had been mentioned in the *Gaulois*, and, of course, all of them bought something, and the till was the fuller for it.

“See the injustice of it,” said Nanon, proud and pleased, yet vexed. “What Toto did at Charenton was really finer than what he did off the Pont d’Austerlitz, because there were three of them at Charenton, and he saved all three, one after another ; and he had to fight with the swirl and froth that were made by the paddles of the *mouche* which had upset the wherry ; but, ouf ! no one of the newspapers noticed that, and so nobody ever asked to see him then—not even the lads he had saved, if you will believe it.

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“That is the way of the world,” said Charlot, with his cheery laugh. “Toto did not do it for praise or for profit ; he did it because his good, big heart told him. He would do the same for a Tropmann, for a Bismarck, for—for—even for a *sergent-de-ville* !”

He selected the worst epithet he could think of.

“Christian charity !” he continued. “Ah, *ma mie*, if you want to see Christian charity, you must leave your priests and come to Toto.”

Charlot was not so fond of the Church as his wife, and often let her go alone to Mass, whilst he smoked his best tobacco in the yard under the fig-tree with Toto stretched out on the flags.

“Give me your hand, my friend,” he would say often ; and Toto would lift up his right foot, the one with a white glove, and have it solemnly shaken. Then Charlot would call him “dear little cabbage,” “sweet little pigeon,” “angel of the hearth,” “glory of the quarter,” and many other caressing epithets ; to which Toto responded with a bang of his tail on the stones, the tail which Charlot called *le plumeau de paradis* !

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"What a child you are, Charlot!" said his wife, when she came back with her prayer-book in her hand ; but she smiled as she said it, for Charlot, childish as he might be, never forgot to keep the charcoal alive and look at the simmering broth in her absence. He had always, too, laid the table ready, with its washed radishes and its modest pint of wine ; its long baker's roll ; its sugared flat cake ; its old flowered Rouen plates ; and its oil and vinegar and lemon waiting their combination for that crown of a French feast, the salad. Toto did not care for the salad, but he did care very much for what was left of the stewed meat and the sweet cake, which came to him as *bonnes bouches* after his own solid meal on ship-biscuits and dried fish.

On the whole he was a very happy dog. He was the darling of the quarter ; he knew all the families by their names ; he let the shoemaker's three-year-old baby ride on his back ; he carried the slates and schoolbooks in his mouth ; he would sit erect, grave as a judge, while Aimée and Jeannot, the tailor's children, explained their lessons to him ; he was friends with all the dogs around, for the biggest of them was so small beside him that they evoked that

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magnanimity which was his most marked characteristic. Even when a little *loulou* which belonged to a notary near flew at him every morning, he only shook his leonine head and walked onward in peace. The notary's *loulou* was convinced that Toto was a coward. So was the notary's wife. The only quarrel which was ever heard over the counter of the Pot aux Roses came out of this.

"Your big hippopotamus has no courage," said the notary's wife, a stout, red-faced lady in a yellow wig, to Nanon, of whom she had been buying some needles and thread.

"No courage!" echoed Nanon, her little bright brown eyes sparkling. "Say that again, Madame Viret, if you will be so good."

"I will say it again, and ten times again, and twenty times again," said the notary's wife. "My *loulou* has the spirit of a lion, but your rhinoceros is a poltroon. Large animals and big men are often the poorest in temper."

"Your little fox is a little devil," retorted Nanon, furiously, forgetful of her commercial interests. "He is a spitfire, a bully, a fiend. Toto is but too good to him; he could snap him up in one mouthful if he chose; he refrains

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because Toto is truly great—truly great, madame—he would not soil his teeth with your little bully and bastard.”

“If I only come here to be insulted,” Madame Viret began very hotly, growing red in the face, for she was a choleric woman, and liked her wine at breakfast and dinner.

“Insulted! What did you call our angel? A hippopotamus—a rhinoceros! Is that not insult? I tell you if Charlot but lifted one finger, Toto would kill your little bastard with a single stroke of his paw!”

“I will never buy a paper of pins in your den again if I live fifty years!”

“Ah, madame, there is no fear of that. People who love the juice of the grape too well——”

“What! After all you owe to my custom; paying you three times over the prices of the Bon Marché for your rubbish!”

“Nanon, *ma mie*! Oh, Madame, pray, pray, a thousand pardons! But you did say ‘hippopotamus,’ and you did say ‘rhinoceros’! I was in the kitchen peeling the potatoes, but I heard,” cried Charlot, as he rushed into the shop very greatly alarmed, for the notary was a man of weight in the neighbourhood.

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"She said 'juice of the grape'!" cried the notary's lady. "Your wife said, 'juice of the grape,' Monsieur! It is libel! I will tell my husband. He will summon her. Juice of the grape! And your prices, which are a score of times higher than those of the Printemps! I will never come down into your dusky hole again! No, not if the Prussians come back and burn down every shop except yours! And Pierrot a bastard, a bastard! It is libel! My husband will make you pay!"

"Pierrot is a lovely little dog, *pur sang*," murmured Charlot, very conciliatingly. "But he does fly at Toto."

"Because Toto is a poltroon!" said the notary's wife.

Then Charlot himself flung prudence to the winds and cried, "A poltroon! If Toto is a poltroon, then so were Alexander, and Cæsar, and Charlemagne, and Napoleon Premier!"

And Nanon muttered—

"If I did say 'juice of the grape,' many people say worse of you, Madame. Many people say, 'drinks of the American Bars.'"

Then the notary's wife, incensed and enraged, threw the packet of needles and thread which

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she had bought, down on the counter, and Nanon gathered up the sous she had received for them, and cast them forth into the gutter, and Toto, having heard his own name uttered by his master amidst all this pother, came into the shop from his broken slumbers under the fig-tree.

“A poltroon, you, Toto!” cried Charlot. “So were the Trois Mousquetaires then, so were the Sept Fils d’Aymon, so was the great Roland himself.”

Toto, seeing the bronze coins lying in the gutter, went out, put his paw on them, and picked them up with his teeth one by one, then trotted off, as he had been taught to do, to the baker’s round the corner, and received in return a pound of *gauffres* in a paper bag, which he brought intact to his friends at the Pot aux Roses. They had been too absorbed in vexation and misgiving to see what he was doing, but when he laid the bag of *gauffres* between them on the counter they kissed him.

“What intelligence!” cried Nanon.

“What honesty!” cried Charlot.

“What kindheartedness!”

“What a memory!”

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"He deserves one," said Charlot; and gave him two.

"But I must send her the needles and thread since he has spent her money," said Nanon.

She did so by Aimée, the tailor's little daughter; and the notary's wife refused to take them; and the little girl went backwards and forwards with the packet a great many times, until, getting tired and being less honest than Toto, she fibbed about the matter, told Nanon that the notary's wife had kept them, and in reality kept them herself.

The breach between the Pot aux Roses and the notary's house remained impassable.

"You told her she drank! How can she forgive that?" said Charlot. "If she did not drink she might, perhaps, forgive it; but when she does——" He shook his head.

To lose a customer so regular and so influential as Madame Viret was no light matter; but Nanon would have let herself be chopped in fine pieces like parsley for a potage rather than take any steps towards apology. "We do not want their sous," she said proudly; but she would not have been a Parisian shopkeeper if she had not known that no single sou is ever flouted by

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the wise. The notary, who was a meek man, regretted his *bézique* and his *cau sucré* with his lost friend, Charlot ; but his wife told him that he was a miserable creature not to summon Toto and his owner before the tribunal, and he dared make no movement towards reconciliation.

Three months had gone by thus, when one day Charlot and Toto, walking on the Quai de Bercy, saw Madame Viret with her Pierrot walking some yards ahead, the little *loulou*, with his tail curled over his back, very smart with silver bells and a blue bow of ribbon.

On the other side of the road there was a large Ulm dog. Pierrot, with his habitual impertinence, darted across the road and flew at the foreigner. The German hound bore the attack for a second or two, then struck Pierrot down with one of his huge paws, and would then and there have ended his days, had not Toto seen the danger, and thinking, no doubt, "He has always been rude to me, but he is a neighbour and a compatriot, this big fellow is a Prussian, and the odds are unfair," he rushed across the road before Charlot had realized what he was about, and threw himself forcibly upon

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the Ulm hound's back. The German let go the *loulou* to turn upon his mightier assailant. Pierrot scampered off in terror to his mistress, and Toto and the Ulm hound looked at each other and measured their respective forces, growling low.

Happily, there were no policemen near to make mischief ; the passers-by did not interfere ; Charlot watched, breathless and agonized ; Madame Viret watched too, clasping her Pierrot, whose blue ribbon was torn and bedraggled.

For one—two—three minutes the two stately combatants stood facing each other like human duellists ; their attitude was superb ; then something in Toto's gaze cowed the other ; something in his regard said, " You are in the wrong—go." The German dog felt that he had met his master ; very stiffly, very slowly, very reluctantly, he acknowledged himself vanquished. He turned and went away without fighting ; not afraid, but humbled and rebuked, like Launcelot by Arthur. Toto stood like a rock until his adversary had disappeared, then he shook himself and trotted up to Charlot ; some working men who had looked on cheered him. Madame Viret burst into tears.

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“And I called him a coward! And he has saved Pierrot’s life!”

Everything was forgotten and forgiven. Charlot and the notary played *béziq* that evening, and Madame Viret told the tale for the seventieth time to an admiring crowd around the counter of the Pot aux Roses.

Even Pierrot conquered his natural temper so far that he never again flew at his saviour.

Thus slipped the pleasant years away; and with each season Toto grew in dignity, and was held in higher consideration by his neighbours. All round the tower of Louis d’Orléans, people loved and were proud of the hero of the Pot aux Roses who had avenged Sedan.

When, in the winter evenings, the lamp was lit, and the two little people talked together of their early life, of their courtship and marriage, of their dear children, of all which had been and all which might have been, they always wound up by looking at Toto asleep in the warmth on his bit of carpet, and saying in chorus—

“But we have had many mercies, and we have Toto.”

And they looked forward with just confidence and natural hope to a green old age.

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But they had reckoned without that fiend which everywhere ruins the natural lives of the people, seizes and wastes their earnings, poisons and kills their wholesome pleasures : that fiend which is called the State, and which is always equally a devil whatever its disguise be called—Republic, Empire, or Monarchy.

Charlot had often been worried by fine, by interference, by citation for this, that, and the other ; he had always dreaded the sight of a printed paper, he had always heard with a quickened pulse the step of the police on the pavement, but he had been prudent, he had been fortunate, and no great trouble had ever come upon him since the days of the Siege of Paris.

He had many friends, too, even in the Administration ; he was so kind himself, so cheery, pleasant, and sociable, other men could not be very morose with him.

“No one can tell why the Good God made spiders, and beetles, and *sergents-de-ville*,” he said once ; but all the rest of the races upon earth seemed to him amiable and agreeable. Nanon thought less well of the world on the whole : he always told her she had a defective digestion, pessimism was spleen. And then

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they laughed together, for the notion of associating pessimism with his little, round, bright-eyed, chirping tomtit of a wife struck both as very comical.

One morning in one month of June, when all Paris was gay with green leaves, glancing waters, red geraniums, and the sunshine made mirth even in the warehouses of Bercy and the mad-house of Charenton, Toto was lying outside the shop-door waiting for the hour to come for his splash and his swim in the Seine. There was no one in the shop itself; Nanon was milling coffee, and Charlot was shelling peas; each could leave in a moment if a customer entered. The sun-rays came into the little dusky interior and lighted up the gilded frame which contained the paragraph from the *Gaulois* about Toto's exploit by the Pont d'Austerlitz.

As Nanon turned the handle of the coffee-mill, and Charlot cracked the pea-pods, they heard a loud, deep-toned bay; it was the bark of the grand dog, in anger; they heard also voices, outcries, the sound of stamping feet, the jingle of scabbards, the oaths of men. They both became as white as the linen of Nanon's coif and Charlot's apron.

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"Toto!" they exclaimed in one breath, and both rushed into the street. That which they had always so piteously dreaded had happened. The dog-snatchers, with their protecting posse of police, had come into the passage at the moment when Toto was basking in the sun under the sign of the Pot aux Roses. The murderous noose was round his noble throat. He had sprung to his feet and was struggling against the brutes half strangled.

"Messieurs! Messieurs!" shrieked Charlot. "Stop, for the love of Heaven!"

"Let go! He is choking!" screamed Nanon. "Let go, let go!"

"He pays his tax."

"He has saved two lives."

"Messieurs! Messieurs! Enter my shop and see! There is the bit out of the *Gaulois* framed."

"He is choking!"

"You will kill him!"

"There is his silver medal in there. Come and see it; his medal for life saved!"

"Let me pay any fine—any fine—what you will!"

"Oh, God help me! They are strangling him!"

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Nanon seized the noose in her hands and wrenched it open ; Charlot flung himself on the man who had thrown it.

“Resistance to authority!” shouted the police.

“Yes! yes! a hundred times yes! Resistance to the death!” shrieked Charlot. “We are good citizens. We pay all that is asked of us. We have lived here for forty years. We deserve respect and——”

The brigadier in command dealt him a blow in the chest with the pommel of his sword. Charlot reeled back against the wall of his house. Toto, feeling Nanon’s hands round him and the noose loosening, aided her efforts with a weighty wrench of his great shoulders, and rushed to his fallen master. The guards seized Nanon and flung her as if she were a rag into the middle of the road.

“Arrest them both!” said the brigadier. “They revolt against authority.”

Toto saw two men seize Charlot ; with one bound he sprang upon them, and they lay prostrate in the gutter.

“The dog is mad!” cried the brigadier, and he plucked his revolver from his belt and fired

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between the dog's eyes. Toto dropped like a stone, his brains oozed out upon the pavement. Charlot saw from where he leaned, sick and dizzy, against the wall of his house. With a shrill scream he fell forward on the body of his dead friend, his face bathed in blood.

"He is dead, too ; so best," said the brigadier ; and he kicked the bodies of the man and the dog where they were lying one on the other.

A crowd had assembled, and at the windows and in the doorways the people who dwelt in all the houses near were looking on, horrified, grieved, but paralyzed by their fear of the police. Nanon lay insensible upon the stones ; Madame Viret ran to her, and raised her head and wiped her temple, which was cut and bleeding.

The brigadier wrote his *procès-verbal* in his note book. It began—

"Whereas, resistance to authority——"

He foresaw praise and promotion which would accrue to him for his zeal in defence of authority : it is such servants as these that the State prizes.

His narration set forth how he had slain a rabid animal at great risk, in his own defence,

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and for the public safety ; he felt sure that the Pasteur Institute would send him some recompense ; perhaps even put his statue in the garden there, beside that of the Swiss shepherd, who beat a dog to death with his sabots.

That night the notary and his wife buried by stealth the body of Toto in a cherry orchard which they possessed at St. Mandé, and buried with him the little gilded frame which held the record of the life he had saved at the Pont d'Austerlitz.

Nanon was lying on her bed, with the wounds on her temple and forehead bandaged, and her brain dulled with morphine. In the shop, on the counter, a mattress was spread, and on the mattress there was stretched the body of Charlot. The medical certificate of his death wrote down its cause as hemiplegia. The populace was quiet for fear of the police ; but it muttered, low and bitterly, savage words, and many small traders near closed their shutters.

The Pot aux Roses was never opened as a shop again.

Nanon partially recovered her health, but she was childish and stupid ever after that day. She lived for more than a year, but she never fully

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recovered her senses. She murmured, "Charlot—Toto" almost incessantly, and spent the whole of her time, from dawn to dark, in watching for them, looking up and down the street from what had been so long the shop door, expecting them home to dinner.

Then, one night, in her sleep, she also died, from the breaking of a blood-vessel on the brain.

The old house has been pulled down this summer, and the sign of the Pot aux Roses has been broken up and sold for matchwood.

Four years have gone by, and every one has forgotten Nanon and Charlot, and the grass grows long over their graves in the Cemetery of Mont Parnasse, as over that of Toto in the orchard at St. Mandé. Only now and then Madame Viret still says to little Pierrot—

"Ah, ce pauvre Toto ! C'était un brave !"

TONIA

TONIA

IT was a little shawl, of a golden yellow, made of floss silk and interwoven with threads of gold twist. It was of oriental make, and had a heavy fringe of its own silk. The girl Tonia did not know its manufacture or its value, but she knew it was some lady's toy, where it hung on a low branch of vine among the dock-leaves and fox-grass.

The sun was shining on it, and made its golden hue gleam like molten gold ; she looked round her, up and down hill, and across the fields. There was no one in sight. She pulled up her apron, and into the pocket which she wore beneath it she thrust the shawl, in company with a pair of rusty scissors, a clasp-knife, some coppers, a dead chaffinch, and a half-eaten piece of black bread.

Then she went on with her work, which was that of cutting grass for the cattle. She hated work. She was seventeen years old, not very

pretty, but well made and well featured. She had an aquiline profile, a rosy mouth with snow-white teeth, and a fair skin, made to glow like a ripe apricot by the sun. She had abundant auburn hair, which was now hidden away under a large cotton handkerchief of orange colour, which came over her face and covered her shoulders and bosom; she wore a blue cotton frock, very short, and on her bare feet were wooden shoes. She cut and slashed recklessly at the long grass, forgetting to be afraid of the snakes in it, so much occupied was she by the thought of the shawl. She cut thorns and nettles and hemlock indifferently with the grasses, and crammed them all into the basket beside her. Then, when it was full, she swung it on her back by its bit of cord and went down the grass path towards the house where she lived, of which only the red-brown, lichen-covered tiles were visible amongst the foliage of fruit and walnut trees. Tonia, which was the abbreviation of Antoinetta, was a young woman who could keep her own counsel. The shawl remained in her pocket, and the secret of its discovery on her mind, unknown and untold, whilst she joined her people in the noonday meal.

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There were present her father, Dario Follani by name, and her three brothers, black and wet with sun and toil and perspiration ; her mother, a woman who at forty looked sixty, with sagging breast, wrinkled face, and rough grey hair ; her elder and younger sisters, Camilla and Pià, and the youngest of all the family, a ruddy, curly, five-year-old male called Tito. There was one member of the family absent ; her father's father.

"Where is Nonno?" asked Tonia.

"He is gone to the mill ; he will be back to-morrow ; he got a lift in the carrier's cart," her mother answered her.

Tonia ate her bean-soup in silence. Nonno was the only person she respected in the world, and the only one with whom she took counsel.

There was some desultory talk amongst the men, but not much ; the jaws moved chiefly to eat, and then closed on wooden pipes ; the mother with a groan took up her dibble and went to sow melon-plants ; the children ran off to school, or what they called school, which was to play in the dust of the highway with their fellows, stone the birds, and if they were in luck, steal cress or lettuce or unripe gooseberries. Tonia carried

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her basket of grass into the cow-house, where the week-old calves, only allowed to approach their mothers for two half-hours in each twenty-four hours, were moaning piteously, and being answered by the lamentations of the cows. Tonia gave them no heed ; she put her load into a corner, and then, being sure of no witnesses, drew the yellow shawl out of her pocket and gazed on it by the dim light of the stable.

It must have belonged to some lady. There were ladies up at the big villas scattered among the pine woods and distant hills, and now and then, very rarely, such people passed through the fields walking for health or going out sketching. It was a lady's pretty trifle, to put round her throat when the wind rose or the clouds darkened. Tonia knew quite well that she ought to take it down to the police-station in the little town six miles away, where her father went with his pigs and his fowls and his cabbages ; but she had no intention of doing anything so simple. She meant to keep it. She was very fond of dress ; she ate her heart out with envy of them when she saw the richer peasantry, at church, with their leather shoes, their silver pins, their sleeves cut like huge gourds. She had never worn

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anything but the clogs cut out of a bit of deal, and the gowns stitched by her mother and sister, plain things made like the Holy Virgin's in old paintings, with the skirts stitched on to the waistband. There was a broken looking-glass nailed up on one of the walls of the cow-house. She had put it there for her own pleasure, and she tied the golden shawl on over her curls and looked at herself, and then draped it round her shoulders and made believe to be a duchess going to the theatre, and then again wound it about her over her hair, and thought how well her skin glowed, ruddy and blooming as it was, against the bright floss silk.

Suddenly a brown arm went round her throat and drew her head back, while warm lips kissed her own.

"Linto!" she cried, half angry, half delighted, as she pushed the arm off her throat. Linto was a sturdy, dark-eyed, handsome youth, who was paying his court to her. She hurried the shawl away into her pocket, but not before he had seen it.

"Where did you get that smart thing?" he asked; he was quick of eye and temper.

"A lady in the town gave it me," answered

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Tonia. "But don't speak of it. You know Camilla is always so jealous."

"Humph!" said Linto. He did not believe her, and he thought Camilla was, on the contrary, always good-natured and unselfish. But he was enamoured with Tonia, and her mouth was as fresh as a rose, and they were alone in the dusky cow-house. He had pleasanter things to think of than a fib, more or less. They were but a few moments uninterrupted, for her father came in noisily, shouldering a great mound of grass: unmarried women are looked sharply after in the provinces in Italy.

"Get you gone, Linto," said her father; "'tis no time for philandering, with all the grass to cut and carry up hill and down hill, and rain threatening. Get to work, Tonia, you lazy wench!"

Tonia's face grew sullen and dark, like the threatening cloud without, but she did not dare to disobey. Her father drove her on before him out of the stable and up the hillside, where the winds were tossing the wreathed vines to and fro. Linto lounged off to his own parents' farm, which was on the other side of a runlet of water and a screen of willows; a farm where he was one amongst twelve.

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His girl had lied to him, but he did not think twice of that; who ever minds a lie in his country? Lies are like daily bread. Only he did think to himself: "If any man gave her that yellow thing he should taste my knife when I found him!"

The land lay on one of the spurs of what are called the Carrara mountains; it was situated somewhat low, and the day dawned late upon it, but it was high enough to see the sea gleaming on the south-west, and in the north and east the mists of marshes and the silvery streaks of rivers, whose names, so dear to poets, are the Arno and the Serchio.

The views beneath and around them were divine, above all at sunset, but neither Linto nor Tonia had any eyes for them.

Linto went to ladle out liquid dung over the roots of young cauliflowers, and Tonia went to take in hay till the sweat ran like water off her face and soaked through her hempen shift. He thought a good deal of her as the stench steamed up into his nostrils unperceived, and of how he should be able to get his people's consent to marry, seventh son as he was, and so many mouths as there already were in his

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parents' household to feed ; but she thought only of the shawl which was all the while in her pocket, as she raked and stacked and carried the great pile of grass on her head to the place where the poor wistful cow mothers stood in the shafts of the waggon, muzzled and yoked, tortured by their milk, and whining for their children. No one in this part of the country has either oxen or horses ; the cows do all the labour, and go to the butcher afterwards : for man, we are assured, had the earth made for him.

All the afternoon she was puzzling in her head what to do with the shawl. She dared not keep it long in her pocket, for her mother often turned out the girls' pockets to see that she and her sisters had nothing there which was wrong ; no stolen fruit, no hidden pence, no bit of finery ill-got, no trinket from an unacknowledged suitor. If her mother found the shawl, down to the police in the town would it go on the morrow ; not so much from honesty as from apprehension ; that Tonia knew full well. The only person whose counsel she could have asked was away, so she put her treasure in an empty tub, covered it with straw, and trusted to fortune

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with an anxious heart; for what we call trust in fate is generally fear of it.

Linto came across the fields again to smoke with her brothers at supper-time; she felt afraid that he might say something as to what he had seen. She took no pleasure in his company, and she answered his jokes roughly. When she got upstairs, she could not sleep, though she was tired; she could think of nothing but the shawl in the tub by the well. Rats might gnaw it, cats might claw it, hens might lay in it, rain might fall on it: what a fool she had been not to put it under some shelter! She got up and tried to go down the ladder which served for a stair, that she might get out and go and look at it; but her mother heard a noise through the wall, and called sharply to know who was moving. Tonia slunk swiftly back to her pallet, and dared not stir again until in the dawn, with the Ave Maria chimes coming over the hills, every one awoke and rose.

Under pretence of seeking for eggs, she, unnoticed, got her treasure out of the tub and put it again in her pocket. It was not hurt in any way, only some bits of straw had caught in it.

"Nonno will know what to do with it," she

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said to herself, as she carried some eggs she had really found to her mother with an elaborate ostentation of honesty.

In the still, cool hours of early morning her grandfather arrived, brought by the miller's men on a pile of sacks behind two buffaloes, but she could not get a word alone with him all the forenoon ; it was not till after the noon-day meal that she found him alone with his pipe in a shady corner where some myrtle-bushes grew behind the cow-house. He was a very old man, and for twenty years of his early life had been a smuggler by choice on that distant blue sea which sparkled under the sun in the south-west. He was very proud of that time and of the men he had killed in it ; had "made cold " in his own figurative language. He was bent in two, and black as a bit of charcoal, but his eyes were sharp and his senses were clear. To Tonia, to all his children and grandchildren, indeed, he was an oracle. He scoffed at them all as poor, white-livered namby-pamby poltroons, who had never done more than pick a quarrel in a wine-shop.

The old man had seen a great deal of various goods in his contraband days, and when she

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showed him the shawl he knew its origin and value.

"Sell it, my dear ; sell it," he said to her. "'Tis a pretty trifle, and comes from the Indies."

"But I want to keep it, Nonno ! I want to go to church in it next Sunday ; and I daren't," said Tonia, with tears trembling in her voice. "I thought I would say you gave it me ?"

"They'd know better than to believe that," replied the old man. "They know I've only got my tobacco money, and that I shouldn't spend any of it on you ; they'd cut me short of it if they thought I did. Sell it ! sell it ! sell it !"

"No !" sobbed Tonia.

The old man chuckled.

"You've got my blood in you. You like what comes left-handed. Where did you find it, Tonia ?"

"On our vines ; 'tis mine !"

"'Tis the foreign Princess's up yonder, I am thinking ; she walks past here now and then."

Tonia winced and twisted her apron ; she had had the same thought.

"Take it to her ; you'll get something," suggested her grandsire. But she sobbed hysterically.

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“No, no, no !”

She clung to her treasure-trove passionately. Possession was law; she had looked so well in it, with its shining gold about her dark hair and peach-like face. The old man had but little warmth left in his dry veins, but the little he had was for her. He turned the matter over in his mind.

“Take it to the Presto,” he said at last. “It will be safe there, you’ll get a little money on it; and you’ll take it out when you like, when time has passed and there’s no danger. You go in with the salad to-morrow. Get away by yourself and go to the Presto.”

The Presto is the State pawning-place, a branch of which respectable institution is to be found in every town.

“Give a name not your own,” he added, “and stitch the ticket they’ll give you inside your shift.”

Tonia stood irresolute, listening nervously to any sound, twisting her apron round and round, wondering how she should find the Presto in the town, of which she knew little except the vegetable-market, which was outside the gates in the ruins of a Latin amphitheatre.

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"Pawn it," said the old man, stuffing more tobacco in his pipe ; "you can't hide it here, and you'll get five francs at the Presto, and still keep the thing."

"Five francs !" said Tonia, with a deep breath ; she had never had as much as a whole franc of her own in her life.

"Ten, perhaps. There's a lot of gold in it," said her adviser. His sight was dim ; but he still knew a good thing and a pretty thing when he saw them.

"There isn't any danger ?" asked Tonia.

"None in life," said Nonno. "The Presto doesn't ask any questions ; no more than the fine folks used to ask where the French silks and the French brandies I took them came from ; not they, not they, my dear. But mind your father don't see the thing," he added. "He is a poor, white-livered soul, is your father, and his stomach turns mighty soon ; men who can read are always like that."

Tonia was comforted, but nervous. She knew that it would be better to give the shawl to her parents, and let them do what they saw fit ; but she could not bring herself to surrender it. What use to have found the shawl unless she gained

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some pleasure and profit out of it? To get money on it, and yet to have it always for her own, seemed the acme of utility to her. It was only Nonno who ever thought of such clever things. He might be palsied and purblind and have one foot in the grave, and wander in his talk sometimes, but he was cleverer than all of them, old as he was. Reverence for age is not a common virtue in Italy, but Nonno compelled it from his descendants; he was so crafty and so cruel, and all the hillside knew that in his young days he had strangled a coastguard or knifed a spy as easily as you squash a frog, or crush a snail, and yet had managed so well that he had never spent an hour in jail. His comrades had gone in his place, as he often remembered with a cheerful chuckle.

He liked her better than Camilla. Camilla was afraid of him, and showed it; she shrank from his tales of his smuggling life; and when he said, with a chuckle, "*Lì freddai*" ("I made them cold," meaning, "I slew them"), she turned pale and went away. Tonia, on the contrary, joined in his mirth, and would listen for the twentieth time with unflagging interest to his story of how he had dashed out the brains of

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the young coastguard on the lugger-deck with the butt of his gun, or of how he had cut the throat of a spy with his knife one hot summer night on the beach by the light of the stars. "Ah! those had been good times," he said; "men were men then"; and Tonia always listened greedily, and wished that she had lived then, and seen the blood run amongst the shingle.

There was a good deal of stabbing still; no cattle fair or horse fair passed off without its quarrel. Roughly cut in deal, and painted with pitch, there were new black crosses raised on the turf of the high-road most years, marking the place where murder had been done; and only a month before this a gentleman of the neighbourhood who was disliked had been shot dead as he had driven past a pine-wood, and public sympathy had screened and sheltered his assassin. But all these things seemed trivial to her. She did not see them; she only heard of them. In Nonno's days, if she could believe him, men could scarcely smoke their pipes in peace if the moon had moved into the light of morning without seeing some enemy or some rival lying face upward on the sea-sand or the hill-thyme.

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That night Tonia left the shawl once more to the shelter of the tub, and tossed restlessly on her mattress through the early dark hours. Her salads were all cut and packed ready for the market, and she had nothing to do except to get up at four o'clock and go down with her elder brother to the town. She had placed her baskets of lettuce and endive close to the tub, and it was no hard matter to take the shawl out unperceived in the grey, dusky dawn, when there was no one near but the cat, and slip it once more in her pocket.

"Buy me some sewing-thread from the shop, Tonia," cried her sister Camilla, opening a casement in the dark. Her voice made Tonia start and turn cold, but the errand was welcome, for it would give her an excuse to go into the streets. A little later she was on the road with her brother Domenico, her great tray-like basket balanced on her head, her feet stepping firmly in their wooden *zoccoli*; the boy had his skip upon his back filled with cabbages and marrows. It was dark, and the stars were dim, for it was cloudy weather.

Out of the darkness and the rows of the vines sprang Linto with a shout.

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“I’m coming too, *sai!*” he cried, as he jumped the ditch.

There was no light by which to see her face, or he would have seen its disconcerted gloom. How would she be able to get rid of him in the town? He was so merry himself that he did not notice the want of any greeting from her. He had to carry a broken rotatory-pump to be mended, and had ingeniously delayed the errand to coincide with hers.

Their wooden shoes covered the miles rapidly, while with every furlong the gleam of dawn brightened and broadened until, before they reached the gate, the day had come. They had the usual tedious, weary, useless waiting in the road to undergo in common with others, the same insolence and injustice to endure from the weighers and tax-takers, the same hunger and thirst and fatigue and useless inaction, and the morning was warm before they were free to pass through the turnstiles and go into the centre of the little city.

Tonia would not trust her sales to either her brother or her betrothed: in matters of interest it is best not to trust your nearest and dearest. She had a knack of selling well, of putting the

best side up, and getting a centime more than her neighbours for what was worth a centime less. Linto, having disposed of his pump, came back and watched her with admiration as her basket was quickly emptied.

"Come and take a pennyworth with me," he said in her ear; "I'll pay for it. Come; we'll have a look at the shops before we go home."

She did not refuse the offered pennyworth of wine; and, after drinking it, she consented to make the round of the shops—small, homely places, which seemed marvels of magnificence to her—but all the while she was pondering how to get rid of Linto; her brother was still in the market with a half-load of cabbages unsold. Linto, never dreaming that he was other than desired and desirable, stuck close to her, his hat on the back of his head, his brown face flushed by the wine. At last, in front of the cathedral, fortune favoured her: there was a crowd round a Cheap-Jack. Linto pushed into the thick of it, very eager to get something for nothing. She gave him the slip, and, carried by the press of country people, hurried round to the back of the Duomo. There, true enough, was the long building with a grey arcade, of which Nonno

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had spoken. She was not shy. She asked a woman if that were the pawning-place.

"Yes, yes," said the woman. "Have you anything to pledge? I can take it in for you if you like."

Tonia shook her head and walked herself through the great gloomy arch of this temple of Plutus under a paternal Government. She joined a string of anxious and sad-looking people, some ill, some fairly well, clad, but all with pain and want written on their features. She did not think of them; she held her treasure under her apron with both hands. The two gendarmes, one at each end of the passage, intimidated her. She did not know how time went, but it seemed to her more than an hour before her turn came at the wicket; her heart turned sick as she surrendered the precious shawl to inspection. She thought one of the gendarmes looked oddly at her; her name was asked, she stammered a false one; the shawl did not return; they pushed across to her seven francs, and a printed card, written on, and she was hastily bundled away and out at an opposite door to the one by which she had entered. The doors of the Presto were opposite the

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northern doors of the Duomo. With a bright inspiration she darted across the hundred yards of stone pavement which divided the two buildings, and entered the cathedral, traversed the nave from north to south, and went out into the square again. She had the money she had taken for her salads, which was all in pence and half-pence, jingling in a knotted handkerchief; but the sum for the shawl, minus a franc, and the pawn-ticket, were safe behind the busk of her stiff stays; leaving out what was necessary to pay for the tobacco, she had stopped in a side chapel of the Duomo to fasten it there in safety. How wise Nonno had been! How shrewdly he had thought of everything! As she let fall the massive leather curtain behind her, and went out, dazzled by the sunshine, Linto caught hold of her with a shout.

"Good heavens, Tonia, where have you been all this time?"

"I have been at Mass," said Tonia, in a tone of severity. "You were so intent on that cheat with his shams, that you never saw me leave you."

"What could you want with Mass? It's not a holy day."

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"Every day is holy, if we make it so. Come, let us get home."

Linto felt abashed, but he was not ill-pleased ; pious wives are as wholesome to their husbands as sulphur is to the vines.

They found Domenico, who was rueful because he had only got rid of his cabbages at next to nothing, and they all went home on their strong young legs, Tonia stopping at a shop near the gate to buy the sewing-thread and the ounce of tobacco, paying for the latter with part of the Presto money, for she had no other.

"She is a good girl," thought Linto, and when Domenico was walking a little in front of them, he put his arm round her shoulders, and kissed her heartily.

When she got home she gave the old man his tobacco, but she did not think it necessary to tell him how much she had received on the shawl.

"They only gave me three francs," she said, when they met in secrecy behind the cow-house ; "but I spent one and six soldi for your tobacco."

"Let me see the ticket," said the old man, suspiciously ; but he was very dim of sight, and could not make out the numerals ; he was obliged to take her word. Besides, he was for

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the moment easy to content, being pleased with himself for his perspicacity in sending her to the Presto.

For a few days Tonia was as well pleased as he. She had six franc-notes stitched in her shift, and the pretty thing was safe down in the town. She was very proud of herself, was rude to her mother, pert to her sister, unkind to the children, and imperious with Linto, assuming the airs natural to a person who has risen in the world. She admired her own astuteness, and considered herself an owner of property. She walked with her head so high that her brothers asked if the house-door should be heightened for her ; but for such silly jokes she had no reply. The cat suffered at her hands, and the chickens and the pigs, for she had seen herself with that silken shawl about her curls and had seen that she was too good for farm-work. Linto began to doubt her piety, or felt that at heart it was not sweet towards others ; but he was in love, and every evening, when the nightingales were singing in the myrtle-bushes and walnut-trees, he came across the fields to sit with her on the bench or walk with her where the moonlight shone.

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"A good lad, Linto," said her father; "I think they may marry come All Saints."

Linto knew that her people and his were all saying this, and that, though he was so young, his elder brothers, who intended to go to La Plata, were willing to waive their rights in his favour in consideration of a little money for their voyage and outfit. But, herself, she began to doubt. That money in her bosom seemed to talk to her of all manner of finer things. She hated the heat, she hated the cold, she hated washing linen, weeding, slug-seeking, beating linen in the water, drying it on the bushes, gathering peas, cutting broom, stacking heather—any and every one of the daily tasks which were her lot, with the sun embrowning her face and the work making hard and horny her hands. The only thing she liked to do was to sit still and weave hempen sheeting upstairs in her attic, for then she could let the frame lie idle on her lap whilst she dreamed of all the fine life there must be in the world if only she could get at it. The worm of discontent was in her, as the evil of the phylloxera works in the healthy vine, making it unsound.

After a few days of this satisfaction and

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exultation she grew less elated, more uneasy. After all, the shawl was no pleasure to her, shut away down in the town, and the money was of no use to her since she did not dare to spend it.

"What is the matter with you, Tonia?" her sister asked her kindly more than once.

But Tonia shook her off impatiently.

"Can't you let me alone? You are like a swarm of bees buzzing in one's ears!"

Even Nonno did not seem to her any longer infallible. She called him in her thoughts an old dotard. He, when he had come to the end of the tobacco, pinched her ear.

"You should take the shawl out and sell it," he said to her. "What will you give me for holding my tongue? Nonno's mum, my pretty. Fill his pipe for him. Fill it as often as 'tis empty, if you want Nonno to be mum."

Tonia began to understand that the old hero might talk to her hurt if she did not humour him. He was fond of her, certainly, as far as his sluggish feelings still moved at all; but he was fonder of good tobacco; he had smoked the best in the days of old, when his brigantine had sailed on that shining stretch of sea to the south-west, and he knew very well that what

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the family supplied him with was chopped straw and dried dung. She could not tell how to get any money ; when she went in to market her father set a price on each leaf and root she carried, and she had to give him on her return their value, and show what she had not sold of them. There was no possibility of stealing a centime unless she sold at a higher price than the one he had set, which was not often possible ; even when she did so one of her brothers was always at her side and knew how much she got.

So she had to take more of the Presto money to get the stuff for his pipe, and more and more till there was little left.

The desire to get back the shawl grew intense on her, but she was afraid to be seen going back to the Presto, and, besides, she must have the full seven francs, and something as well for interest, before they would allow her to redeem it, and where was she to keep it if she got it back ? She would have to show it boldly, and make up some tale of a friendly giver. But her family were suspicious of her tales. They had heard a good many of them. And Linto—Linto, who was easily jealous—would be sure to

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ask many tiresome questions if his curiosity was once aroused.

"Fill my pipe, Antoinetta!" said her grandfather, shaking the pipe at her; and she knew that what he meant was: "Get me good stuff to smoke, or I'll tell!"

She grew to hate the sight of him, shambling along under the vines, or sitting on the cow-house wall with his little, sharp, black eyes, like gimlets, seeming to bore into her very brain.

"Get me some good tobacco for Nonno," she said to her betrothed.

Linto demurred; good tobacco was very dear. But, at last, wishing to please her, he bought half an ounce of the best he could get; but wishing also to stand well with the old man, presented it himself to the hoary, aged figure, seated doubled together in the sun.

"He knows now that you bought it!" cried Tonia, almost in tears.

"Why shouldn't he know?" asked Linto. "Perhaps it'll make him like me. Wasn't that why you wished me to get it?"

"Yes, yes!" she said impatiently; "but I wanted to give him some, too!"

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"Poor Tonia!" said Linto, ruefully. "I'll try and buy some next week. I didn't think. I haven't got a soldo left now."

"What a gaby he was!" thought Tonia, who had no patience with people who did not understand at a gallop, taking hints as a night-jar takes gnats on the wing.

"Tonia is always out of temper with me," said the young man, sadly, to Camilla, who answered with a smile:

"People in love are always tetchy, Linto."

"Humph!" said the young man. He doubted Tonia's love for him; he had a glimmering perception that if there were any suitor better off in the neighbourhood, Tonia would soon send him about his business, though she was enamoured of him in a capricious way.

"My mother is right, perhaps. Camilla is the flax-flower and Tonia the poppy," he thought; he had heard this said very often at his home, where the elder girl was the greater favourite, but he had never attended to the comparison.

In the dusk of the evening Nonno said slyly to her:

"Linto brought me some rare good stuff. I've a mind to tell him, little one, what you've

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got stitched in your stays. Fie, you mean vixen ! grudging a poor old man his pipe."

"You smoke all day," said Tonia, out of patience, but turning hot and cold.

"Chopped straw," grumbled Nonno. He meant to get enough good tobacco to last him into the winter out of her before he had done ; and he did get it, until the francs of the Presto were all spent.

Tonia wished she had never seen the shawl ; her rosy face grew grey with fear, for she knew her grandfather, if feeble on his legs and confused in his memories, held on to an idea as the cat clung to a branch where a nest was. When the tobacco should be forthcoming no longer, he would revenge himself on her, she was sure.

Her father was sacristan of the parish church, and it is part of the sacristan's duties to keep the church accounts, buy candles, wafers, bread, brooms, anything which is wanted, and account for such expenses to the Vicar and the parish. A peasant is usually sacristan of his church for a year, and this year the office had fallen to him. He kept a little of the church money in a bag, in a locked box, in the wide shaft of an unused chimney in the back of the house. It

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was put there for safety from beggars and tramps, but its hiding-place was no secret to the family, and its key was always hidden in the salt-pan.

Tonia watched for an occasion when every one of them was working in the more remote fields, and she was left to guard the house and weave at her sheeting. She got the key of the box out of the kitchen cupboard, got the box itself out of the chimney, opened it, and helped herself to four francs from the bag, then to six more ; then it seemed a pity to leave any ; she took two more, and only another two remained. She took those also, and hurried back the box and the key to their respective places. With the money in her bosom she went upstairs to her frame, and was weaving diligently, sitting by the window, when her people came in from the fields hot and hungry. The next day she bought her grandfather's tobacco : the best she could get in the village.

"Good girl, good girl," said the old man. "I'm mum, Tonia."

Fortunately for her there was no need at that moment for her father to go to the church-bag ; every purchase had been made that was necessary

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for ecclesiastical purposes, and it was never opened except when there was some need. But Corpus Domini was not far off; it fell that summer on the twentieth of June. For that feast the bag would be opened certainly. She felt sick when she thought of it; but it was only the seventh of June now. She said to herself that she would put the amount back somehow or other before that time came. Some vague scruple withheld her from asking the aid of the saints in this difficulty, but she told her beads and said a paternoster. "That never can do harm," she thought. So completely did her own affairs engross her that she did all other things ill: mixed threads in her weaving, forgot to feed the pigs, spilt the milk in carrying it, and received many a sound scolding from her people. But she returned these with scorn and indifference: they seemed to her a pack of fools, worrying their lives out over a broken flask or an empty swill-tub.

She had money enough left when the tobacco had been bought to get the shawl out of the Presto: how to do it without being seen was the problem which engrossed her, for her mother, who fancied her manner odd, had gone

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in herself with the salad and cabbages for the last ten days.

Even buying the tobacco in the village had been attended with danger, for if her family heard of it she knew that they would certainly question her as to how she had got the money. She could not say that she had received it from Nonno, because the old man never had a farthing : their filial admiration for him never went so far as to give him a halfpenny. The aged are looked on in peasant families as so much lumber that would be better cut down and put on the fire, like old tree-stumps, if there were not a law against it. Nonno's splendid past, in his smuggling days, secured him respect, but respect did not go so far as filling his waistcoat pocket with good pence.

She might have coaxed her mother into giving permission, or she might have gone without permission, for they were used to her disobedience ; but she did not care to go again into that place, with its watching gendarmes and its suspicious-looking assayers and clerks at the wickets. She had got off safely once, but she knew that it was a mere chance. Another time she might be questioned.

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Being at her wits' end, and having long experience of Camilla's trustworthiness and affection, she confided a part of the truth to her sister ; a small part, and that garbled, but enough to enlist assistance and win sympathy.

She told her that she had been given the shawl by the foreign lady up at the ducal villa, and had pawned it by her grandfather's counsels, being afraid that her parents would take it from her as too fine a thing to be worn ; that she had always kept the money received for it, and wished now to take it out, as she could sell it and buy her gown for her wedding with the proceeds. Would Camilla go and get it for her ? Her parents would never suspect Camilla of anything wrong.

Camilla was a simple girl, of no great wit ; but even she thought the narrative a lame one, and concluded that there was something that was not told to her.

"Did the lady really give it you ?" she asked doubtfully.

"Certainly she gave it me," said Tonia, very proudly. "I have done her many favours : showing her the way in the woods, finding her ferns, and the like."

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"I did not know you had ever seen her," said Camilla, much surprised.

"Do you suppose you know all I see and all I do?" said Tonia, with much arrogance. "The lady would take me away if I would go," she added ; for, in invention, as in eating, appetite grows on what it feeds on, and has no limits once having left the realms of fact.

"But you would never go away from Linto and from us?" cried Camilla, in great dismay.

Tonia gave a toss of her head, and a fine gesture of immeasurable disdain.

"Who knows what grand fate I might not get in the world? I am handsome, you know, and I am clever."

"Yes, dear," said Camilla, in meek acquiescence, but disturbed. "But don't you love Linto?" she added.

Tonia shrugged her shoulders.

"That is all foolish talk," she said roughly. "Will you go to the Presto, or won't you?"

"I will go, if you wish it so much," said Camilla, reluctantly. "But I don't see——"

"Never mind that. Nobody wants you to understand," said Tonia. "Mother'll let you go into the town, and she won't let me go

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anywhere. That's why I tell you to do this thing."

"You are sure this shawl is really your own?"

"Really? really?" replied Tonia, with mimicry of her tones. "Yes, it is; and the lady offered me a bracelet, too, but I wouldn't take it, for one likes to show these great folks that one can have a spirit as well as they can."

Camilla looked at her with tenfold increased admiration; to talk with princesses and to refuse bracelets seemed to her to place her young sister on a pinnacle absolutely unattainable by any one else. It created such a confusion in her simple brain that she forgot to observe the discrepancies in the narrative.

Camilla was, as usual, subdued and credulous; she admired her sister so greatly that it seemed quite natural, after all, that Tonia should be acquainted with fine folks. She did not like the errand to the Presto at all, for she was shy and easily frightened, and the secrecy enforced upon her was disagreeable to her. Nevertheless, she took the ticket and the money, and consented to do the unpleasant errand.

One thing Tonia did not tell her, for fear of

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exciting her alarm : she did not tell her that she had given a false name and address.

Two days later Camilla went into the town with the salads and some early cherries, accompanied by her youngest brother. As she went out of the courtyard she looked at Tonia and nodded, touching her breast. She meant to say that she would do the errand faithfully ; and Tonia understood, where she stood stacking dung, but did not need the assurance. She knew that Camilla was such a simpleton that she would never think of cheating. How she hated the work ! She drove her fork into it passionately. What was the use of marrying Linto, when this was the kind of labour which would await her—always in the sun and the rain, always bending her back and straining her muscles, always spoiling her nails and burning her skin ! What a life these women all round her led, working like men even when they were with child, toiling worse than even the men did, toiling like so many cows, with children at their breasts year after year for a dozen years ! What a life !

At that moment a loud shriek broke on her ear ; out of the house her father came with

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outstretched arms, and screaming like a stabbed hog. Tonia lost all her colour; she comprehended what had happened; he had the empty church-bag in his hand, and was shaking it in the air like a madman.

"Tonia! Tonia!" he shouted. "They have stolen the church money. Perdition seize them! Flames everlasting burn them!"

His wife came out behind him, rending the air with her shrieks. Tonia, with admirable presence of mind, sprang down from the dung-heap, and joined in the outcry with well-acted amaze and horror.

"Twenty years has the box been there and never a finger touched it!" cried her father. "Sacrilege! 'tis sacrilege! The thief will burn for all eternity."

Tonia, despite her courage, shook in every limb as she heard; but she continued to scream at the top of her voice, and her parents suspected her of nothing but sympathy and alarm.

"When did you open it last, father?" she asked, with chattering teeth.

"Oh, 'tis ten days or more ago," he answered, wildly tearing his hair. "There's been nothing to go to it for; but now Corpus Domini's right

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ahead of us. I said to myself, 'I'll count the money.' 'Twas locked; locked all safe and sound, and the key in the salt-pan; and I open it, and every stiver's gone. You would give a drink to that pedlar last Monday," he said fiercely, turning to his wife. "Like enough 'twas he."

She defended herself as fiercely.

"A decent man who has sold tins along the road twenty years! Not he, not he. There was a tramp last Wednesday week I found sitting on the bench——"

"Oh yes, to be sure, 'twas the tramp," said Tonia, eagerly. "An ill-looking man, with a squint, and he asked for broken crusts."

"What's the matter?" asked Nonno, getting off his seat on the wall, and coming towards them feebly, bent in two over his stick.

"Father's found the church-bag empty," said Tonia.

For one instant the little, sharp eyes of the old man met the girl's large, startled, dilated eyes, and said to her as plainly as if he had spoken, "So that is where my tobacco came from!" But he did not say a word to compromise her, and neither of her parents suspected

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her for a moment. Only her father, grown a little calmer, said, rubbing his forehead ruefully :

“How the deuce could anybody from out-of-doors know that the key of the box was kept in the salt-pan ?”

The shouting and screaming had brought in the boys from the fields and half a dozen people who were on the high-road going up into the woods to cut heather and underwood : the clamour was loud, the chatter endless, and the man was almost consoled for the loss of the money by being the hero of such a misfortune. Tonia was weeping with great effect ; her fright, being genuine, made her tears flow abundantly. So great was the excitement, so absorbing the theme, that they none of them noticed that Camilla had not returned, nor the boy who had accompanied her either. Only when they were about to eat a mouthful at ten o'clock, as their habit was, did they perceive her absence.

“She has been detained at the Presto,” thought Tonia, with a quaking spirit.

As they were eating their bread and salt fish, her father never ceasing to swear against the thieves, the youngest of the boys, who had gone with her, came back.

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"I can't find Milla," he said breathlessly, and afraid of being scolded. "I've been all over the town ; I got so hungry I thought I'd better come home."

"What did you leave her for?" shouted his mother, cuffing his ear.

"She left me!" said the child, sobbing ; "she went shopping."

"Did you give her any errands to do?" asked her mother of Tonia.

"No, mother," said Tonia, innocently. "She must have gone to buy for the neighbours."

It was unlike Camilla ; she was punctuality itself, and she always did exactly what she was told, neither more nor less. But they finished their meal, and, to punish the boy, gave him bread without a morsel of fish.

They were just done, and were going out to their respective labours, when her father, struck by a sudden thought, said, smiting his thigh :

"Damned if I haven't forgot to tell the police ! They won't find the thief ; but there is a fine if you don't tell them when there's been any robbery."

"Ah, to be sure there is," said Tonia, eagerly. Her face was hidden as she tied on her big

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orange kerchief and pulled it over her eyes. "You had better go, father."

"Who asked your leave?" said her father, crossly. He was a good-natured man, but he was sorely put out by the loss of the church money, which, of course, he would have to make up out of his own savings, and his savings were fewer than his debts.

"You can describe the tramp to them, father, can't you?" continued Tonia, with officious zeal. "I can. A short, lean, ill-looking fellow, with red hair, and a blue shirt and corduroy breeches all torn. I marked him well."

Nonno, listening where he was smoking, chuckled silently: she was a chip of the old block, a brave girl, with a glib tongue: he was proud of her.

"How should the tramp have known of the salt-pan?" said her father, dissatisfied and perplexed.

"The police will make him tell," said his wife. "Go and clean yourself, Dario, and go and talk to them."

At that moment there was a clatter of horses' hoofs on the dry road at the back of the house, and a jingling of chains and sabres rang upon the

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air as two gendarmes rode through the opening from the road into the courtyard before the house. Dario ran out to them, alarmed and annoyed.

"I was just coming to tell you of it, sirs," he said breathlessly, afraid that they would denounce him for having delayed the declaration of the theft, and making sure that, in some unknown way, they had heard of it. The old man and Tonia shrank back into the shadow of the yawning hearth : he had had many a hard tussle with officers of the law in his day, and hated the sight of any ; and she, when she saw these dread shapes, felt her heart thump against her stays until it seemed to burst them.

One of the riders, the brigadier, looked surprised.

"Why are you here ?" he said. "You should go to the town."

"I know I ought, sir," said Dario, piteously ; "but I only waited to eat a bit."

"You are an odd father," said the brigadier.

"Eh, sir ?" Dario thought he could not hear aright. He began a long, confused narrative of the loss of the church money, to which the carabineers listened as impatiently, as their horses

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shook their heads under the torment of the flies and horse-flies.

"If you have lost anything, denounce it at the office," said the brigadier, cutting short the story. "There is more trouble for you than that. You do not seem to know. Your elder daughter has been arrested down in the town. I came as a friend to tell you. Go down at once, or she will pass the night in prison. This is quite irregular on my part, but I have known you many years."

Dario stared, with his eyes starting out of their sockets.

"Camilla, my Camilla arrested?" he gasped. "Oh, there must be some frightful mistake, sir! What do they think she can have done?"

"Go and see. They will tell you at the Questura. If you have been robbed here as well, denounce the theft. She may be guilty of that too."

They turned their horses' heads and rode out of the courtyard, having their beat to follow along the lonely road which wound up through the woods. Dario clung to the brigadier's stirrup, and his wife clutched the horse's tail, screaming; but they could get nothing more from him than

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the bidding to go down to the town and see for themselves. The brigadier was sorry for the news he had brought, for he liked Camilla, but he was afraid of being mixed up with the affair, and embroiled with the authorities. The mother and father hurried away without changing their working-clothes, beside themselves with anxiety, and drowned in tears, which washed deep channels in the dirt of their faces. They had given no thought to Tonia and the old man, who were left alone facing each other.

Nonno grinned.

“You sent Milla to bear the brunt of it, eh, my wench? You’re a rare one, Tonia! And you’ve got your father’s money, too, or I’m a dead man. Lord, child, don’t squirm with me; I know what you’ve been after; and I’ve been mum, haven’t I?—mum as the very stones?”

But Tonia turned from him in disgust; she was sobbing with terror and the certainty of exposure, for, of course, if Camilla had been taken up by the police, it must be about the shawl, she reasoned; and if Camilla were questioned, she would be obliged to speak; that was equally sure.

“Why did you tell me to go to the odious

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place?" she sobbed. "You are a wicked old man. Everybody is wicked who lives when they ought to be dead, and eats when they can't earn!"

No sooner were the words out of her mouth than she would have given ten years of her life to recall them; for she dreaded her grandfather beyond all other persons, good or evil, and she realized that she had undone at a blow all the work of establishing herself in his favour which she had toiled at with so much ardour ever since she had been a baby. The old man said nothing, but his face, as he leaned forward listening, with his hands on his knees, was that of a demon; his little eyes glittered through their rheum, his toothless jaws gibbered and chattered noiselessly, his lips foamed. Then he staggered on to his feet, tottered towards her to strike her, and, his weak knees giving way, dropped heavily on the bricks of the hearth, struggling and choking.

Tonia was so terrified at his aspect that she threw down the platter she was holding, and dashed out into the open air and into the green fields, leaving him still vainly striving to utter oaths and striking violently with his stick at the place where she had stood. She fled upward

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through the wheat and the vines to the wood which edged them, far above where the water-courses ran and the broom was flowering, and the cuckoo calling from the distant oaks. She flung herself down, face forward, on the earth, and wished that its brown soil would open and swallow her.

How long she remained there she did not know: it might be minutes, hours, or days for any count that she kept of time; but all at once the wood seemed filled with a clamour of voices calling on her name. She knew the voices: they were those of her brothers and of Linto. She stumbled to her feet and changed her path like a hunted animal, and scrambled higher and higher, where the stone-pines grew, and hid herself in a hole in the ground, where the thickly growing vegetation formed a screen for her. She scarcely knew why she ran away, for flight could only postpone the hour of discovery, it could not avert it; but she had ceased to reason. She acted on mere non-reflecting instinct, the impulse to run away and hide. But the voices pursued her, and she could distinguish what they said. They were shouting to her to come down, for Nonno was

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struck dead. Trembling from head to foot, she came out from the tangled undergrowth and showed herself.

"What are you up here for when there is such trouble in the house?" said her elder brother Domenico in angry surprise. "Nonno is dead; we found him dead just now. Why on earth did you leave him alone?"

She was about to say that she was going to cut wood, but she remembered that she had no bill-hook, and that she must look alarmed and odd.

"I saw him die," she said, with shaking voice. "It frightened me so, I dared not stay."

"And you called nobody?" said her elder brother, incredulously.

"I did not think," she stammered, "I was so frightened."

"Frightened? You?" cried her brother. "Well, come down. The neighbours are there; they will want something to eat."

As they went down the hill, the young men pushing and pulling her along with them, she began to recover her spirits; if Nonno were dead, the chief witness against her was silenced for ever; she felt sure that Camilla would find some way to shield her, let her suffer what she might.

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When they reached the house, some women from the neighbouring farms had pulled up the old man from the hearth and had got him on to a big settle, where he was struggling between them, breathing stertorously and looking like death, but still not dead, as she had hoped. How foolish she had been to leave him there ! A little force at the right moment, a tap of his own oak staff on the right place, and he would have been safe and sound, out of the way for all time. Now the neighbours had got him, and were burning feathers, holding lighted paper under his nostrils, and putting to his clenched teeth a decoction of herbs and spiders which was considered of sufficient virtue to call the dead from their graves.

Tonia shrank from the sight of the doubled-up, motionless figure.

“He was always so good to me !” she whimpered.

She was still horribly afraid ; but fear looked very like grief, and passed muster for it with the neighbours.

It was now very late in the day ; the sun was setting, and its light streamed through the open door of the dwelling-house ; outside the cows

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were lowing, the pigs grunting ; their fodder and food had been forgotten ; the nightingales sang in the myrtle hedge. Over the threshold with heavy step returned her parents, alone ; they looked crushed to the ground with shame and sorrow. When they saw the old man they were mute and callous. What did that matter ? They hoped he would die. There would be one mouth less to feed.

"Where's Camilla ?" called the women and the boys. Tonia alone was silent : as silent as the paralyzed old man.

"They've got her," said Dario, hoarsely. "They won't let her out."

His wife had covered her head with her apron and was weeping as she had wept all the way from the town.

Linto had followed them into the room, and, without saying a word, had come and stood behind Tonia's shoulder. His face was dark and moody. At this juncture he leaned down behind her and muttered in her ear :

"Confess ! Confess, then. Do you hear ?"

She heard, but she did not obey. A shiver went over her, and the tan of her face grew greyer, that was all.

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Her father, with his hat dashed on the floor and his arms folded, was still filling the kitchen with his lamentations.

"So good a girl! So modest, so docile, so quiet! A thief? Camilla—my Milla? I won't even believe it. Things look black. Oh, they look black! I don't deny it. And the money went out of the church-bag, too; but that Milla took it I can't believe. I'd as soon believe that the Virgin got down off the wall there and did it—may the Holy One forgive me my blasphemy!"

"Confess, you jade!" said Linto in Tonia's ear. In the uproar of the women's shouts and sobs, and the noisy weeping of the children, none heard him. The old man was struggling violently between the arms of those who held him. He wanted to say something and could not; his toothless jaws were shut tight like the teeth of a trap, his eyes started out of their sockets; he was alive, but he was impotent. Tonia's eyes watched him with fascinated gaze. If he continued paralyzed she would be safe.

Linto moved away from her and swore a fierce oath.

"What has Milla done?" asked the neighbours and the youths in shrill chorus.

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The father, staring stupidly at the old man on the settle, answered :

"She won't speak, they say. She went to the Presto with a ticket to take out a shawl she'd put in, so they say ; and it seems that the shawl was stolen, and the police were looking for it, and at the Presto it had been ordered to stop it. I don't know—she'd given a false name with it—so the police took her ; and they've got her, and we couldn't see her ; but they said there was no manner of doubt of her being in fault, because she has nothing to say for herself and won't speak."

Then he lapsed into silence, and his head sank on his breast.

"Perhaps she took the money out of the church-bag, father. But I don't think she would," whimpered Tonia, through floods of tears. "There must be some mistake—some dreadful mistake."

"Yes, there is a mistake," said the voice of Linto ; "and you will set the mistake right, Tonia, or I will wring your neck like a fowl's. I saw that shawl on your head in the stables ; you hid it. I'll swear you pawned it the day you said you'd been to Mass in the Duomo. As to

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the church-bag, I don't know ; but as to the shawl, I do. I'll take you down to the town to-morrow and make you confess. You cheat, you thief, you jade, sending your sister to suffer instead of you ! ”

The struggling, doubled-up form on the settle wrested itself out of the women's hold ; a thin, strangled voice came from under the battered hat ; Nonno gasped for breath.

“ I am not dead—not dead—not yet,” he said, with a faint rattle as of laughter. “ I'll bear witness—against you—Tonia—he ! he ! he !—bought my tobacco and grudged it—yah ! ”

Linto, with his strong hands on Tonia's shoulders, pushed her towards her father.

“ Lock her up, Dario,” he said sternly. “ Lock her up somewhere safe, and to-morrow we'll take her down to the town, and have Camilla out. Love you, you jade ? Marry you ? Faugh ! not if there wasn't another girl in all the whole wide world.”

The old man on the settle struggled to get free from the restraining hands of the women who were ministering to him.

“ Shouldn't eat when we can't earn, Tonia,

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eh? Well, you'll go and eat jail bread, my dear—because you've earned it—he! he!—and you'll tell me how you like it, my pretty, eh?"

Tonia was dumb.

THE END.

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